

# The Newsletter



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A virtual  
exhibition for  
remote times



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Explaining  
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Japan

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**The 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'.**



## In this edition of the Focus

# Online resources for Asia scholars

Sonja Zweegers and  
Alessandra Barrow

No one has escaped the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; we were forced indoors, sequestered to our 'home offices'. The online world has become very familiar to all of us. And so, for this issue of The Newsletter, and as a way to highlight our ever expanding list at [www.iias.asia/resources](http://www.iias.asia/resources) a Focus section like no other, designed specifically for the time in which we find ourselves: an exploration of online resources that may assist (or at least entertain) the Asia scholar.

### Ute Jansen is the new IIAS Deputy Director

On 1 January 2021, the International Institute for Asian Studies welcomed Ute Jansen as its new Deputy Director.

Ute Jansen has longstanding experience as an executive manager in several development cooperation organisations, including Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education (NUFFIC) and Oxfam Novib. Besides collaborating with local partners on humanitarian projects, she was involved in higher education capacity building projects, with a special focus on Indonesia, Bangladesh and countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Her interest in Asia started 30 years ago with first a Master's degree in Japanese and Korean languages, and later, a position at the Embassy of Japan in Germany. After adding a Master's programme in Humanitarian Assistance, Ute worked in numerous countries, including Uganda and Burundi. She has now lived in the Netherlands since 2004.

Ute takes over from Willem Vogelsang, who served IIAS as Deputy Director for more than 9 years. Willem plans to use his retirement to pursue his passion for researching, writing and curating.

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.

Postal address  
PO Box 9500  
2300 RA Leiden  
The Netherlands

Visitors  
Rapenburg 59  
Leiden  
T +31 (0) 71-527 2227  
[iias@iias.nl](mailto:iias@iias.nl)

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Managing editor:  
Sonja Zweegers

Editorial assistant:  
Alessandra Barrow

Editors for The Focus:  
Sonja Zweegers  
and Alessandra Barrow

Regional editors:  
Su-Ann OH (ISEAS) and Ilhong Ko  
(Seoul National University Asia  
Center)

The Review pages editor:  
Wai Cheung

The Network pages editor:  
Sandra Dehue

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Thomas Voorter

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Lava

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[iiasnews@iias.nl](mailto:iiasnews@iias.nl)  
More information:  
[iias.asia/the-newsletter](http://iias.asia/the-newsletter)

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[iias.asia](http://iias.asia)



# Imagining the university in the post-COVID world

Philippe Peycam



One of the disquieting questions the pandemic has forced us to consider is, What will universities, now partially if not totally deserted, look like in the post-COVID world? The massive use of online virtual instruments means that the old model, in which universities physically concentrate all their activities in one single location, as the Western university was built after, may no longer completely hold true. In fact, the tendency towards an online environment was already on the rise with the advent of e-learning, MOOCs, open universities, etc., and their increasing grip on the higher education 'market'.

I recently revisited an article that appeared in June 2020, at the height of the first wave of the pandemic, by Rohan D'Souza. The author characterised the struggles between three university paradigms or 'ideal types', and what they mean for the future of 'the university': the original 'Humboldtian' model, built around the idea of turning students into autonomous 'citizens' by developing their own reasoning powers in an environment of academic freedom; the neoliberal model, based on the understanding that education is above all the preparation of 'student-clients' to hit the labour market; and the irrepressible rise, both as continuity and rupture of the latter, of 'EdTech' university platforms, where credit-based online education-certification leads to the abandonment of the experience of in-person learning. For D'Souza, it is the struggle between these until now overlapping value-imbued paradigms that will determine the future of higher learning. In his powerful account, the author warns of the possibility of an irreversible trend towards the disappearance of most physical universities.<sup>1</sup>

With a few months' hindsight, we can see that D'Souza's description was possibly excessive. The presence of university campuses and their communities of students will not disappear from our urban landscapes so easily. However, D'Souza's description of the transformation nonetheless points to some tectonic changes that will likely present themselves due to COVID-19. What remains powerful in his argumentation is that it forces us to grapple with some of the inherent contradictions within these university paradigms, in a way that the path toward a dystopian future remains real.

I see at least two such contradictions. The 'Humboldtian' university, a model inseparable from the nation-state project imagined in the early nineteenth century for an 'enlightened' category of society. Its massification after WW2, with considerable investments on the part of states, succeeded in bringing a ratio of above 40% of tertiary education gross enrolment (a figure reached in the US in the end of the 1960s, in Europe in the 1980s). However positive the trend was, at a time of economic growth and full employment, it led to a phenomenon of invisible separation within society, between those who 'made it' (to college) and those who did not.<sup>2</sup> The American Vietnam War was an illustrative moment when the education gap gained political visibility: whilst less educated youth were drafted to fight in Southeast Asia, those at university, exempt from fighting, were demonstrating on campuses against the war. When they returned home, the former found themselves basically ignored, if not rejected,

by the latter. This rift was accentuated by the economic crisis and the introduction of neoliberal policies from the 1980s onward. It has since encysted into a 'them-and-us' socio-political culture, and has led to the perception amongst many that universities are primarily instruments of social segregation. Meanwhile, the university model has remained a luxury for most countries in the South, where the ratio student/national population has remained much lower.<sup>3</sup> In most decolonising nations, a number of emblematic new establishments served as national development pillars. In Nehruvian India for instance, state interventionism in the 1950s and 1960s led to the creation of a network of public universities and the now renowned Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) system. Yet, those who benefit from this public system, even if it has continued to expand, remain a tiny minority of the population, which is a situation that has invited the development of a large private higher education sector, not always synonymous with high quality.

The second contradiction lies in the neoliberal 'corporate university' model and its economic and human unsustainability. The progressive introduction of this paradigm in the wake of the 'Washington Consensus' in the 1990s, led to a further expansion of higher education services. Predicated on economic 'usefulness', the corporate model de-emphasised the 'gratuitous', speculative and deliberative pursuits best represented by the humanities and the social sciences – which were deemed less 'useful' – whilst it imposed an arsenal of managerial methods aimed at evaluating, and quantifying, every aspect of academic work in the name of 'marketability'. Built on the sacrosanct belief in competition – between individuals (tagged as 'human resources'), institutions and countries – the new model justified a vertical 'selection', which was ultimately not very different from the old elitist European tradition. 'Ivy League' US and UK universities showed the way by transforming themselves from national to global educational and elite markers, a trend reinforced by attributes of academic distinction such as prestigious University Presses, peer-reviewed journals, endowed centres and Professor Chairs.

Yet, as D'Souza pointed out, the continuation of the neoliberal university is founded on students' willingness, and capacity, to take on increasingly higher debts to pay for their studies. This model is built on a deleterious system at a time when an inflation of diplomas faces a reduction of (good) job opportunities. The system is also built on a faculty and staff population in an increasingly precarious situation, most hired on a temporary basis.

## Universities as EdTech platforms

D'Souza foresees this economically unbalanced model experiencing a dramatic turn when the classroom-campus 'humanistic' experience finally implodes, and is replaced by the new business model represented by EdTech. This new paradigm, EdTech, is based on the same competitive utilitarian ideology as the corporate university models, yet it corresponds to a new level in that model: through the commoditisation of higher education by using computing platforms (the 'Big Tech') in order to virtually aggregate transactions between clients (the students)

and providers (universities), thereby bypassing the traditional (public) role of the latter as part of the so-called new 'platform economy'. A direct consequence for higher education therefore may be a trend towards its effective dematerialisation, and the gradual depletion of the university as a brick-and-mortar campus, and with it, the communities of faculty and students forged through inter-personal encounters and interactions.

When EdTech reaches maturity, D'Souza predicts it will no longer operate on the basis of a cycle of semesters spent by the students at a physical campus, but mostly through online connections from anywhere in the world, driven to accrue *à la carte* courses provided by a few platforms. These platforms will attract much larger numbers of online 'students' without the hard costs of maintaining buildings, libraries or a vast number of employees, faculty included. Quite naturally, as already the case for other service businesses, we may see algorithm-operated platforms like Amazon or Google forge working alliances with a handful of prestigious university names – turned into certification 'brands' – to lead the train to comprehensive digital education.

During the first wave of COVID, we witnessed the surprising readiness of some flagship institutions – Cambridge, Harvard, MIT, Science Po, LSE – to shut down their physical activities and move everything online for at least one or two years. Even if these policies were later amended to allow students to partially return to classrooms, these renowned establishments could obviously not resist entering the new business fray. What they may lose in tuition fees, particularly from overseas students, they will eventually earn many times more in online course-based subscriptions.

The consequence of such a trend is not just the demise of an organisational, economic model. It is the ultimate atomisation of individuals, faculty and students alike, and the unravelling of the civic educational experience that the university, as we know it, offers. What the COVID crisis reveals indeed, is the extent to which universities should be appreciated for their primary role, as vectors of social development and cohesion. Unless strong decisions are taken, this existential role may be threatened, as was recently commented on in a South African academic periodical: "The pandemic is an inflection point. It behoves universities to re-imagine new teaching and learning possibilities. It calls for universities to re-examine the way they do research and pursue collaborations. It calls for the sector to re-examine how it works. Higher education must re-define the rigid bureaucracies that characterize the system. Universities must also pursue bold responses to enhance their sustainability, relevance and contribution to the country's socio-economic advancement."<sup>4</sup>

## Rethinking the university, on the basis of collaboration and situatedness

We must ask ourselves, Is there an alternative to the EdTech predicament? As we saw, even in its benevolent expression, the old university model may have suffered from an original hubris, a hubris reinforced by the post-cold war victory of the West, in which it was thought that *total knowledge* could be encapsulated in universities as repositories of all what (Western or Northern)

societies saw as valuable knowledge, as a mark of their ultimate superiority, exclusive of the immediate communities from which they emanated, and of the world in all its ecological and human diversity.

But as the pandemic has shown (or reminded) us, we live in an interconnected, complex world, in which human-nature relations and the different forms of knowledge drawn from them are all entangled. We now understand that the virus is a consequence of our relentless encroachments on the environment and its biodiversity. By getting rid of our anthropo-ethno-cultural provincialism, along with our neoliberal obsessions, we can imagine a more sober, anchored, multi-centred, horizontal and inclusive experience of Academia. One that combines collective activities embedded in our local environment (human and natural), in dialogue with colleagues from other 'ecosystems' in the world, for a mutually beneficial collaborative educational and research process. This *modus operandi* can make use of online devices, but without falling prey to the Tech platforms and their deadly logic.

Facilitating structures like IIAS can play an important role in this reinvention process. Because it operates on the basis of collaboration, as a versatile multi-function platform (I here want to reclaim the word!), the institute and its world counterparts can help universities rediscover their civic role. With its capacity to forge connections of different kinds while promoting locally-situated/globally-connected knowledge production streams, IIAS can help bring forward the kind of approach that no EdTech will ever achieve.

This is the effort IIAS has unleashed through a number of coalitions of willing partners such as ICAS, SEANNET and HaB. Like IIAS, our Asian, African, American and European partners recognise that only through collaboration, without assumed hierarchies, and through their adherence to a set of essential principles, including the recognition that different forms of knowledges are equally worthy of engagement, that a new universal 'multi-lingual' framework can be forged. With its Humanities across Borders (HaB) program in particular, IIAS offers organisational and methodological perspectives for a truly co-developed pedagogy; one in which universities reclaim their role as unique meeting-grounds, as was foregrounded in the program's Manifesto preamble (written by representatives of the 18-institution members of the HaB consortium, just before COVID-19 got us in its clutches):

"We envision a university that reclaims its rightful civic role and responsibility as a confluence of multiple nodes of knowledge exchange. Our goal, as educators and institutions, is to identify and explore the expansive variety of modes and contexts of acting in, and on, the world. We propose to create border-crossing spaces within and outside universities where academics, students, and communities learn from, and act and work with, each other, in an atmosphere of mutual respect and recognition."

Philippe Peycam, Director IIAS

### Notes

- 1 D'Souza, R. 2020 (June 8). 'Zooming Toward a University Platform', *RAIOT Magazine*, India.
- 2 The sociologist Emmanuel Todd calls it 'educative stratification', in *L'illusion Économique* (Gallimard, Paris, 1997). Todd also draws from Michael Young's seminal *Rise of Meritocracy* (Penguin, London, 1958), who first predicted that the rise of higher education would lead to that of a sentiment of inequality within society, and for the members of the highly educated strata, an inclination toward separation from the less educated groups.
- 3 It was 4% in 1980's China; it is now over 30%.
- 4 Kupe, T. & Wangenge-Ouma, G. 2020 (15 Nov) 'Post-Covid 19: Opportunity for Universities to have a rethink', *The Conversation*, South-Africa.

# What kind of history can we write of the Song dynasty?

Christian de Pee

## A lack of transparency

Texts are never transparent. One sometimes reads that an historical source provides 'a window onto the past' or that it 'offers a glimpse' of a former person or custom, and many a research proposal today proposes to use a certain archival collection 'as a lens' for examining a chosen subject matter. Such visual metaphors are misleading, because they imply the possibility of unmediated access to the past. They elide, however briefly, that which exists—a physical text—in favor of something that has vanished—an event in the past—and thereby suggest that the historical value of a text lies behind it rather than in front of it, that the referent of the text is more substantial, and more historical, than the text itself. If one wishes to use a visual metaphor, one might better compare a text to a painting. Like painters, writers deliberately choose and compose their scenes, compress time and foreshorten space to fit these scenes within a unifying perspective, and represent them in conformity with the conventions of their period and their genre. A painting is not a window; neither is a text.

The texts that survive from the Song dynasty are particularly resistant to a transparent reading. First, almost all surviving texts from the Song are written in classical Chinese, a written language that perpetuated the grammar and the idiom of the fourth century BCE and that was distant from the language spoken during the Song. To write in classical Chinese during the Song involved not only the transformation of vernacular action into formal writing, but also the translation of colloquial speech into classical diction, embellished with literary allusions. One might compare the effect to that of a medieval European text that describes a contemporary market in the high Latin of Horace or Cicero.

Second, almost all surviving texts from the Song are written in set genres and conform to the conventions of form, style, content, and ideology that defined those genres. When learned men and women wished to set down their thoughts, they selected a genre that suited the subject and the mood of those thoughts. When required by an occasion to write in a

particular genre, they chose a subject, images, and sentiments appropriate to that genre. They created original effects and an individual style, not by violating conventions but by obeying them, demonstrating their ability to express themselves coherently and elegantly within the strictures of form and style, with subtle variations on the phrases of earlier writers. Writing in classical Chinese, in other words, required the overt display of literary skill and literary knowledge. The mode of representation was to a large extent also the object of representation.

Third, almost all surviving texts from the Song were preserved for ideological reasons, as examples of good style and proper morals. From the trunk of a deceased man of letters, his descendants or his friends selected the compositions they deemed worthy of him and therefore worthy of being imitated by others. (Writings by women were very rarely published during the Song.) Subsequent generations made their own selections, reprinting authors whose learning and virtue retained their reputation or aroused new enthusiasm, while works that had fallen into disfavor became first rare, then obsolete. The writings of those who supported the controversial economic reforms of Wang Anshi (1021-1086), for example, have nearly all been lost, to the extent that much of the ideology of the reforms must be reconstructed from criticism by their opponents, whose writings later generations admired and preserved.

The linguistic anthropologist William F. Hanks has observed that, "historical texts illustrate discourse under minimal conditions, because of the vast amount that can never be known of the context, and this makes it all the more necessary to be explicit about how we read".<sup>2</sup> Historical research must begin with the acknowledgment

that the textual record is incomplete and that the particular incompleteness of the textual record is itself an historical artifact, the product of historical choices. The acknowledgment of this incompleteness is not an obstacle to historical knowledge; it is its precondition.

## An intellectual history of social life

I began thinking about such historiographical problems as a Ph.D. student in the early 1990s. I noticed that the Song Empire described in the scholarly books and articles I read looked different from the Song Empire that I imagined when I read primary sources from the period. The prose style and the mode of reasoning in the block quotations and paraphrases of historical monographs often did not sound like the style of the prose and reasoning I thought I heard in texts from the Song dynasty. It seemed to me that the translations and paraphrases inflected the language and manner of the sources in order to fit them for analysis by social-scientific methods. I did not think that the translations were wrong or that the arguments were inaccurate, but I felt that the translations and the arguments diminished the distinctiveness of the sources and that a subtle variety of cultural knowledge was lost in the process. Instead of conforming the language and reasoning of the sources to existing analytical categories, I wondered whether it might not be more interesting to use the language and reasoning of the sources to generate new analytical categories.

In my dissertation I attempted this latter approach. Having originally intended an anthropological analysis of wedding ritual during the Song and Yuan (1272-1368) dynasties, I found that the wedding ceremonies recorded in the sources did not add up to a coherent sequence and that they had to be understood in the first place as scripts for the performance of the ideology of the genres in which they were written. Instead of reconstructing an average wedding sequence and subjecting that sequence to a structuralist analysis, I placed wedding ceremonies within their generic context, showing that the ceremonies inscribed in each genre—ritual manuals, writing manuals, mantic texts, and legal texts—instigated the ideological notions of time, space, and body of that genre:

the symmetrical, centered, porous time and space of exegetical discourse, where the groom and the bride merge with sacred Antiquity; the linear time and space of literary discourse, where the written bodies of the groom and the bride proceed through an anterior, metaphorical time and space; the cyclical time and space of cosmological discourse, in which calculations and diagrams chart a safe path for the liminal groom and bride through liminal time and space; and the imperial time and space of legal discourse, in which codes and verdicts carefully inscribe the groom and the bride into a transparent hierarchy of imperial subjects.<sup>3</sup>

What kind of history can we write of the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE)? The question seems naïve and limiting. Didn't the spread of printing during the Song preserve more texts from that period than survive from earlier dynasties, and don't these sources allow us to write almost any history we would like? The problem is that these printed texts are nearly all that remains, and that they are formal, generic, and public. They do not lend themselves to the kinds of narratives that historians of medieval Europe have written based on unique, individual manuscripts in monastic libraries and municipal archives.

This post-structuralist approach to text and ritual practice revealed, among other things, that the authors of the ritual manuals had themselves a structuralist understanding of ritual.

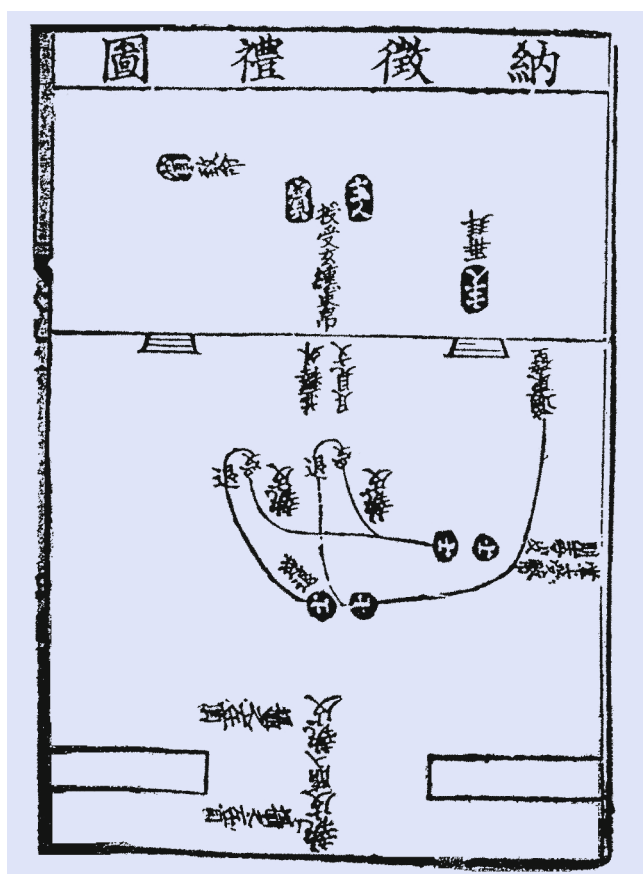
Since in these texts the inscription of the wedding ceremony constituted the primary historical act—its eventual performance in reading or in ritual embodiment being unknown—I argued that we know most about the historical practice of Song and Yuan weddings when writing itself was a ritual act (e.g., the calculation of a horoscope) and when the text itself was a ritual object (e.g., the letters exchanged during betrothals). Critics of my work have objected that these arguments deny the existence of an historical reality beyond the text, but in fact the arguments extend historical reality to include the text, and demonstrate that any knowledge of the world behind the text depends on our understanding of the world in front of it. This enlarges the potential evidence and the potential subject matter of history instead of diminishing them. The analysis of letters of betrothal illustrates this most vividly. Although these letters present direct evidence of the practice of Song and Yuan weddings, previous historians of weddings and marriage had omitted them from their monographs, presumably because they are literary exercises that do not provide specific material details. Read as performances in their own right, however, these letters can be placed among the written and material exchanges by which two families confirmed to one another that they had firm possession of the learning and the wealth that they had advertised to each other through the matchmaker.

The performativity of the act of writing that dominates the surviving texts from the Song dynasty may prohibit the kind of social history from the bottom up that historians of medieval and early modern Europe have written, but it does allow a lively intellectual history of social life, and a detailed knowledge of historical ways of seeing and thinking among the literate elite. As a Fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies during the 2019-2020 academic year, I began writing a general history of eleventh-century China based on these historiographical insights. I hope to show that the history of the Song dynasty can be made accessible and interesting to a general reading public when it is told as intellectual history.

Christian de Pee, University of Michigan; former IAS Fellow [cdepee@umich.edu](mailto:cdepee@umich.edu)

## Notes

- 1 Cf. Ricoeur, P. 1981 (edited and translated by John B. Thompson) *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press and Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, p.93.
- 2 Hanks, W.F. 2000. *Intertexts: Writings on Language, Utterance, and Context*. Rowman and Littlefield, p.11.
- 3 de Pee, C. 2007. *The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China: Text and Ritual Practice in the Eighth through Fourteenth Centuries*. State University of New York Press, p.13.



Left: Text as practice. The editors of the thirteenth-century *Ceremonies and Rites Illustrated* (*Yili tu*) reconstructed the choreographies of ancient rituals and represented these choreographies in maps, as in this map of a betrothal ceremony.

# Explaining low crime Japan

Laura Bui



The introduction of *Crime in Japan: A psychological perspective*, my recent co-authored book, opens with the novelist Kazuo Ishiguro's observation on British depictions of the Japanese.<sup>1</sup> His observation is actually the start of his 1985 review, in the *London Review of Books*, of John David Morley's 'Pictures from the Water Trade: An Englishman in Japan'. Ishiguro remarked that the British were compelled to depict the Japanese as "extreme and bizarre" as to assure themselves that their way of life bore no resemblance to that of the Japanese. He then went on to review Morley's book, and although generally complimentary, he found that old, imperialist ways still persisted: simplistic explanations for Japanese ways of living and a tendency to assume that anything unfamiliar must be uniquely Japanese. "Behind this", Ishiguro wrote, "seems to lie the sadly familiar presumption that white-European cultures comprise world culture".

Introducing *Crime in Japan* in this way intended to highlight the concerns of trying to understand crime and justice phenomena beyond Europe and North America as an outsider, and within a collective knowledge base that is predominantly informed by a white Western viewpoint. The study of crime and criminal justice, known as criminology, whether past or contemporary, is no exception. Often, the simple reason given in criminology for why studies of other countries and populations are needed is there are few compared to the many of Western countries and populations. Advancing understanding by including other lands and people is to expand the knowledge base and make it more collective, and significantly, to increase the accuracy of that base. For precision is relative to whom collective knowledge represents, erases, and caricatures.

Japan has been of particular interest in criminology because of its comparatively low crime rate. After World War II, countries like Germany, England and Wales, the US, and Canada experienced rising crime rates, which were attributed to industrialization, and the rates never returned to the pre-transformation numbers. This, too, was expected of Japan, but higher crime did not happen. Although there was an initial surge, the crime rate subsequently declined and continued to do so over the same period. In addition, its economy at that time was remarkably strong. This success of a thriving economy and low crime was what attracted attention from scholars who wanted to know why this was the case. A number of explanations had been given, ranging from the country's supposed homogeneous population to geographical location. But the most complicated, because of the larger issues and implications that surround it, is the cultural explanation.

## The cultural explanation is simplistic

Explaining low crime with culture is to say that collectivist traits like group-orientation, inclination towards harmony, and high self-control are why the Japanese do not murder, assault, and steal from each other as much as others in different countries. Evidence of this is limited, but commentary and speculation are many; so much so that Japan has been

considered the country that endures the most stereotyping in comparative analysis by Western scholars. The frequent criticism is that the cultural explanation is simplistic and does not provide a complete understanding of crime in Japan. Although this is true, it is also true of any single explanation for crime. Culture is not in itself the issue, but when it is used to reduce a group of people to a few characteristics thought to be inherent, it gives the false impression that it is easy to explain away any phenomena because of that group's perceived lack of complexity, and therefore, that group's inferiority.

The cultural explanation used in this essentialist way is a familiar narrative with a long history of use to emphasise the irreconcilable differences of those who originate from 'the Orient'. In the US, for example, those of Asian ancestry have long been considered to be an 'invasion' and the 'Yellow Peril', whose perceived foreignness, regardless of how long they and their families have lived in the country, is perpetual.<sup>2</sup> The mass relocation and imprisonment of Japanese Americans by their own government during World War II comes to mind. When no longer perceived as a threat, a similar, though more positive, narrative of innate difference is bestowed: 'the Model Minority'. Inherent cultural traits derived from a Confucian belief system are thought to be responsible for success across an array of social and economic indicators when the reality is that this narrative is used to shame other racial minority groups. Either narrative of innate difference sees outcomes, good or bad, as resulting from fixed cultural traits. The present pandemic has shown the tenuous nature of this narrative: anti-Asian hate crimes in the US rose tremendously in 2020 because of the false belief that COVID-19 is intrinsic to anyone who is thought to look Chinese.<sup>3</sup>

The cultural explanation, when transformed into a narrative of innate difference, has also been used by the Japanese, but to demonstrate their exceptionalism, and at certain points in history, their superiority to other Asian 'races'.<sup>4</sup> Romantic and idealised Western understandings of Japanese crime and criminal justice have appeared alongside, and were possibly encouraged by, the discredited but enduring body of work called *Nihonjinron*, comprising theories on a distinctive Japanese national and cultural

identity. Post-war, particularly during the height of economic prowess beginning in the seventies, *Nihonjinron* took on a favourable view of prevalent, inherent Japanese characteristics, attributing interdependence and nurturance of group relationships to current societal achievements. The late seventies ushered in a number of campaigns that provided opportunities for other countries to learn from Japan in its approach to education, management, and industry. Low crime, in this context, was considered yet another aspect that supported Japanese exceptionalism.

## A matter of translation

Whether Japan truly has low levels of crime, however, has been contested. As found in other countries, the fundamental limitation of official crime data, often derived from police reports, is its capacity to capture only the tip of the iceberg. Domestic violence, sexual assault, and white-collar crimes are likely to be underreported, and their prevalence are actually thought to be high. The use of self-reports, where information is given by individuals themselves, is one way to counter this limitation of official data.

My early research compared the level of violence between Japanese and American male youths using self-reports, and unexpectedly found that violence was more prevalent among the Japanese. As the result conflicted with the prevailing understanding of low crime Japan, the paper had difficulty getting published. The study needed replication as it compared two different versions of interpersonal violence: "hit someone with the idea of seriously hurting them" was used in the pre-existing English version, but the direct "hurt someone in a fight" was used in the Japanese translation. Part of the challenge of making comparisons is that exact translations may not yield comparable results. The use of a forthright understanding for the Japanese translation was thought to be the equivalent of the meaning conveyed by the English version. Before, a 2009 study compared anger among Japanese and American children. Usually anger is understood as an expression, but when a measure that captured experience rather than expression was used, anger was unpredictably higher in Japanese children – it seemed that they were better at self-regulating their anger so did not show it.<sup>5</sup>

## Studying unfamiliarity

While *Crime in Japan* features culture as one of seven examined explanations, the explanation actually filters into the others – what behaviours are deemed illegal and the sort of responses towards them, not to mention what a justice system decides to manifest as, are dependent on cultural values and practices.<sup>6</sup> The result is that each explanation

serves as a glimpse into related idiosyncrasies that mingle with each other and might give rise to particular crime phenomena. It is evidence that crime is not the consequence of a mistaken understanding of culture as a container of innate, fixed qualities. Similarities to what is already known about crime are also identified in the book, and situating these explanations in the collective knowledge base while traversing varied cultural presumptions are the challenges of cross-cultural research.

There is then the question of why bother? If studying unfamiliarity makes one susceptible to wrong presumptions or to conclude that it is impossible to make any interpretation, then such study must be futile. But wanting to understand others has been a characteristic commonly shared amongst us. 'Explaining' low crime Japan is misleading because explanations are never simplistic, and the same is true for all crime phenomena everywhere. Yet curiosity, the want to understand, can be a potent driver for fact in all its captivating complexity.

Laura Bui is Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Manchester. *Crime in Japan: A Psychological Perspective*, co-authored with David Farrington, University of Cambridge, was published 2019 by Palgrave Macmillan. The book uses psychology to elaborate on seven common explanations for crime in Japan, while confronting the complexities of narratives on Japan as a low crime country. It received Honorary Mention in the 2020 Distinguished Book Prize from the Asian Criminological Society.

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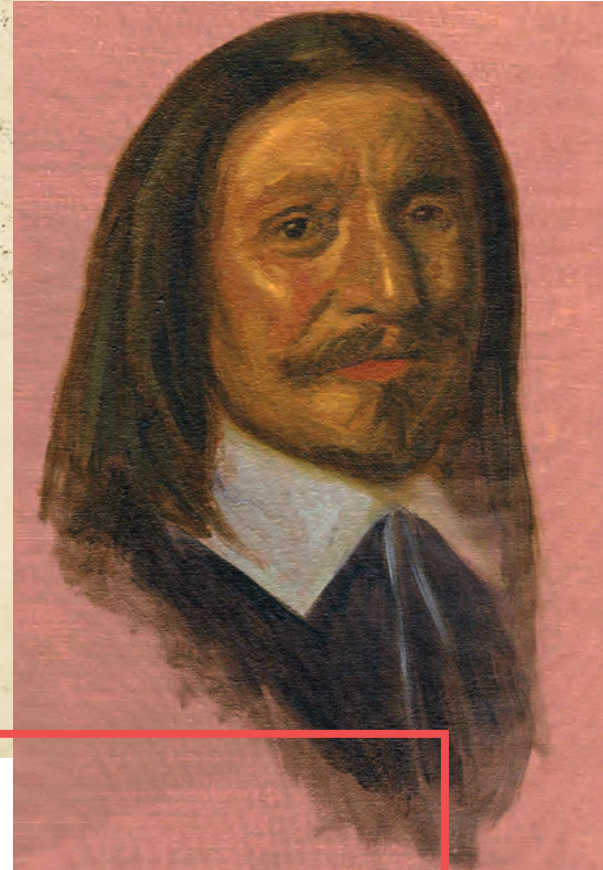


Fig. 1 (left): Map of Ayutthaya around 1650. South of the city along the river lies the small Dutch lodge across from the district where the Portuguese and Japanese merchants were settled. The factory was enclosed by a rectangular bamboepagge (= fence) and a moat. The main building functioned as a warehouse and as living quarters for the senior Company servants. The other employees shared a number of small houses on the grounds. In: Gijsbert Heecq, *Journal ofte Dagelijcxsz Aenteijkeninghe wegen de Notabelste Geschiedeniszen voorgevallen en gepasseert op de derde Voyagie van Gijsbert Heecq naer Oost-Indien* (Journal kept by Gijsbert Heecq on his third voyage to the East Indies), 1654-55. The manuscript is kept at the Dutch National Archives, The Hague in the collection *Aanwinsten van de (voormalige) Eerste Afdeling* (Acquisitions of, what used to be, the First Department), inventory nr. 959, access code: 1.11.01.01.

Fig. 2 (left): Jeremias van Vliet (1602-1663), Mathijs Gootjes. Image courtesy Schiedam Council Archive, Amsterdam.

# Sex and trade in seventeenth century Siam

## Osoet Pegu and her Dutch lovers

Wil O. Dijk

### A tale to tell

Born in Ayutthaya around 1615, Osoet came to the Dutch compound at an early age under yet unexplained circumstances.<sup>1</sup> In time she would have a succession of Dutch lovers and have children with two of them.<sup>2</sup> On 18 June 1658, she passed away after a long, lingering illness followed by a stroke that left her paralysed and unable to speak. The Dutch persuaded the King not to have her cremated as was customary in Siam, but to allow her to be interred in the Company's cemetery in accordance with Christian religious practices.<sup>3</sup>

In the absence of crucial building blocks – diaries, correspondence, memoirs, reminiscences, autobiographical writings and the like – from which to construct Osoet's life story, we can only rely on what others had to say about her. And this is precisely where the problem lies since those others were VOC officials, westerners who tended to portray 'native women' as sensual, lustful, and immoral. Sadly, Osoet's story is of necessity wholly based on the very sources that overwhelmingly privilege the viewpoint of white Calvinist males steeped in a patriarchal Christian tradition. Still, these materials contain information not available anywhere else and, as one author pointedly remarked: "Without the VOC documents there would be no tale to tell at all".<sup>4</sup> And indeed, a tale there is to tell, albeit that without any personal records to build on, we can merely situate Osoet Pegu in her time and place.

The time was the seventeenth century and the place Ayutthaya, Siam's celebrated royal capital, one of Southeast Asia's leading port cities. Its centrally located market place consisted of a long, wide, spacious lane with on either side an array of stalls selling a wide range of goods. And here, in the heart of the city's business centre, female traders played a key role, more often than not as prominent, large-scale commercial participants with the requisite capital and connections that enabled them to be successful. The wide gulf separating the Royal Court from the marketplaces was precisely what brought the likes of Osoet Pegu into their own. Aristocratic ladies would look for women, often of low birth or non-Siamese identity, who could move linguistically and culturally across social boundaries to act as intermediaries.<sup>5</sup> Osoet was of non-aristocratic descent with an undoubted mastery of the Dutch language and familiarity with European ways, making her the perfect mediator and cultural broker.

Over the years, Osoet had intimate relations with a succession of Dutchmen. Two of her three Dutch lovers were directors of the VOC's Ayutthaya office. They would have been aware that a relationship with a well-connected and astute businesswoman such as Osoet, was crucial to the smooth running of the Company's trade since she was well placed to mediate between the VOC and the Palace. And indeed, Osoet's contacts and influence contributed in no small measure to the successful sealing of lucrative business deals beneficial to all parties concerned, not least the VOC.

After about a century of Europeans steadily trickling into Ayutthaya, Siam's capital city at that time, representatives of the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie or VOC) arrived in 1604 and planted a factory (or trading post) there four years later. With varying degrees of success and intermittent closures, the post survived until 1767, when the city was razed by the Burmese. Siam was essentially an export market for the VOC and the mainstay of its Siam trade was without doubt the export of deer hides to Japan. Osoet Pegu, a remarkable woman of Burmese-Mon descent, was a formidable trader and force to be reckoned with in Ayutthaya. This article takes a look at the impact she made, based on VOC archives.

### Jan van Meerwijck

The first of Osoet's Dutch lovers was Jan van Meerwijck. In 1621, he sailed East as an assistant in the service of the VOC. He left the Company in 1627 to become a private trader and joined a group of Dutch free burghers that was then very active in countries around the Bay of Bengal, Siam in particular. Jan van Meerwijck and Osoet Pegu met in Ayutthaya, perhaps at the Dutch compound. At 16 years old, Osoet moved out of the shadows and entered the VOC annals as Van Meerwijck's wife or concubine. She bore a son shortly before his untimely death in 1635. The exact manner of his death is not certain; he was reportedly clubbed to death in Burma, but an entry in Batavia's *Daghregister* [Daily Journal] records that he was captured near Martaban and hanged.<sup>6</sup> Be that as it may, Jan van Meerwijck came to a sorry end leaving Osoet to embark on a remarkable and rewarding new life in Ayutthaya in which the Company and other Dutchmen would play a key role.

### Jeremias Van Vliet

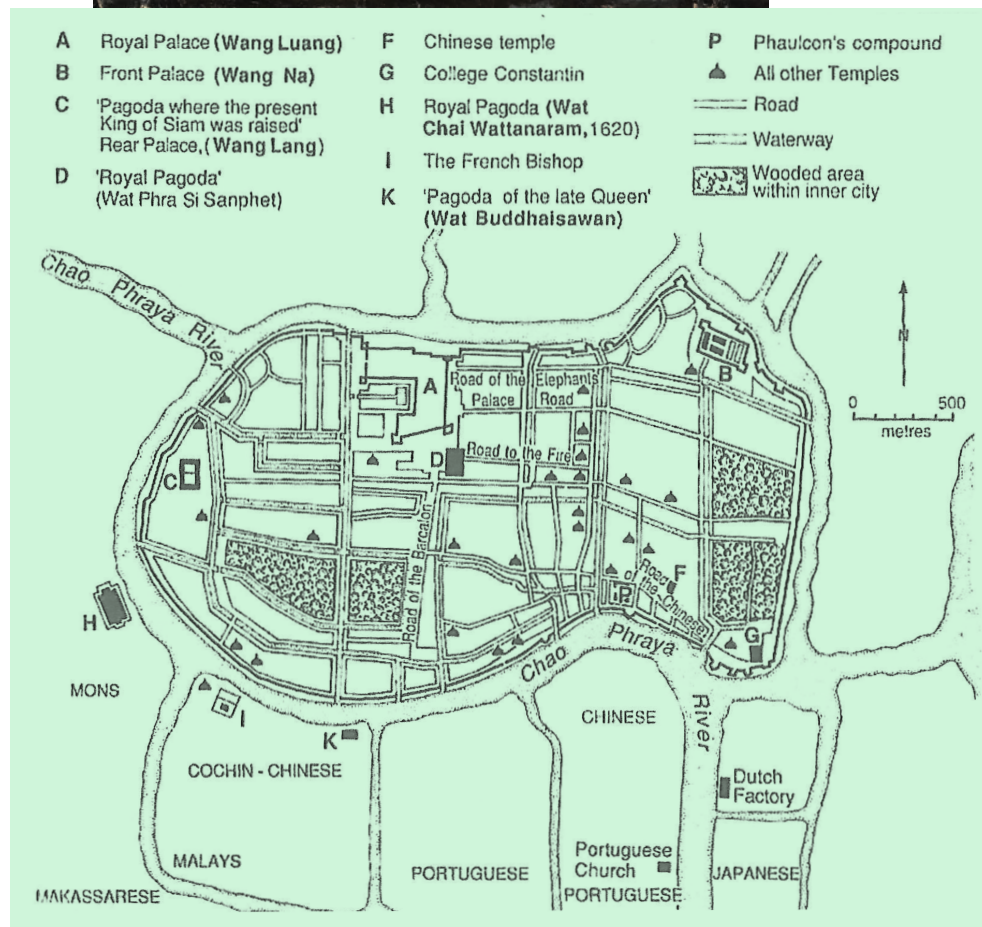
Jeremias van Vliet was Osoet's second lover. He sailed from Holland in 1628 and was posted to the VOC's Japan factory. He left for Siam in 1633 and took over the directorship in 1636, a post he kept for five years. Charges of dishonesty were laid against him in 1645, but rather than putting him on trial, the Company repatriated him. He went home knowing full well he would never be allowed to return to Asia.

Van Vliet and Osoet probably began their relationship around the time he was made director, and when she was 21 years old. Their relationship lasted many years during which she bore three daughters. As director, Van Vliet will almost certainly have turned to Osoet when her aid was required for contacts and influence at court. These links made her an invaluable and indispensable intermediary between the Company and the Palace. Sources clearly show that Osoet was already well established both at Court and in the trading community well before she met van Vliet.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 3 (left):  
Rycklof van Goens  
(1619-82), Martin  
Palin. Image courtesy  
The Rijksmuseum,  
Amsterdam.

Fig. 4 (below):  
Ayutthaya in 1687.  
In: Anthony Reid,  
*Southeast Asia in  
the Age of Commerce  
1450-1680, Vol. II,  
Expansion and Crisis*,  
New Haven and London,  
Yale University Press,  
1993, p. 81.



Eventually, their three daughters became the cause of endless wrangling between Van Vliet and the Company on the one hand and Osoet and the King of Siam on the other. Disputes about children fathered by Dutchmen with local women were quite common. Upon leaving Ayutthaya, the Dutchmen usually sought custody of their offspring. At the very least, they wanted them sent to Batavia for a 'proper' Christian upbringing. The King, however, was adamant that these children belonged to Siam and should remain in the country with their mothers.

Van Vliet petitioned the King on several occasions to allow his daughters to leave the country. In a letter to the then VOC director, Van Vliet suggested that the children were probably being kept in Siam because their mother refused to let them go, and he begged the VOC director to rescue his daughters from the clutches of 'those pagans'.<sup>8</sup> But it soon became clear that so long as Osoet was alive it would be impossible to wrest her daughters from her since her prominent position allowed her to thwart the Company at every turn.<sup>9</sup> It is indicative of the high regard in which she was held at Court that the King did not permit Osoet's daughters to leave the country till after their mother's death and even then, only after further pleadings by the Dutch Governor-General.<sup>10</sup>

### Jan Van Muijden

Jan van Muijden, the third of Osoet's Dutch lovers, left Holland and went east in 1643. A year later he arrived in Ayutthaya as a junior merchant. A mere two years later he was made provisional director and the following year permanent director, a post he held till 1650. A man of limited ability who barely spoke Siamese and had no experience in running an office, the twenty-five year old Van Muijden increasingly relied on the older (31 year-old) and more experienced Osoet Pegu. They soon developed a sexual and business relationship whereby Osoet effectively took over all the buying and selling of the Company's goods.<sup>11</sup> Unpleasant gossip notwithstanding, there can be no doubt that Osoet was besotted with her handsome young lover, and he no less with her. She spared no pains to win him the favour of the Siamese authorities and through her efforts he obtained generally hard to come by export licences for rice, hardwood and other products.<sup>12</sup>

In time, misgivings began to emerge about his administration and negative reports reached Batavia, the VOC's headquarters in the East, alleging that Van Muijden and the 'shrewd' Osoet jointly handled all the Company's affairs and that he followed her advice to the letter.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, Osoet's influence over the Company's Siam affairs was never more pronounced than during Van Muijden's stewardship from 1646 to 1650.

The Company's trade flourished, mainly due to the pair's invaluable connections with the Siamese Court, particularly the friendship and patronage bestowed upon them by one of the King's chief brokers. This triangular relationship was instrumental in speeding up the Company's business, such as the procurement of products and export licences.<sup>14</sup> In the early years of Van Muijden's directorship the King even granted the Company a monopoly on the export of deerskins. This was quite a coup for the Dutch, for it allowed them to exclude all other merchants from the Siamese hide trade; moreover, these skins were much in demand in Japan where they made huge profits. In 1652, after Van Muijden was recalled to Batavia, the King revoked the VOC's deerskin monopoly.

Company records portray Jan van Muijden as a shady character who was to blame for his own downfall. He stood accused of fiddling with the books and conducting an illicit private trade with Japan. After his records were audited, he was found guilty of corruption and mismanagement, stripped of his directorship and recalled to Batavia. Van Muijden protested his innocence throughout and in the end there was insufficient evidence to convict him. Still, unable to wholly clear his name, he was not permitted to return to Siam.

As for Osoet, a prominent VOC servant (Rijckloff van Goens) declared quite unashamedly that she had grown prosperous and influential by cohabiting with several VOC directors and that her subsequent wealth had allowed her to exert pressure on the Siamese government and even the King.<sup>15</sup> He did acknowledge though that in Osoet's day every Company director had made convenient use of her prominent position to obtain favours from the Siamese authorities and insisted that good relations be maintained since, for a variety of reasons, Osoet Pegu was more deserving than others.<sup>16</sup>

In retrospect, it is astonishing that Van Goens, a high-ranking representative of a trading company with as its *raison d'être* the acquirement of the highest possible gains, could accuse as astute a businesswoman as Osoet of making a profit! Especially since the high point of VOC-Siamese relations coincided with the period in which Osoet Pegu's influence over the Company's affairs was at its peak (the 1630s and 1640s). Undoubtedly this had much to do with Osoet's influence in royal circles, yet Van Muijden's own positive contribution should not be underestimated. To show his appreciation, the King bestowed on him a high Siamese rank. But, in the end, Batavia's refusal to reinstate Jan van Muijden had a negative effect on Siamese-Dutch relations. A respected VOC servant wrote in his diary in 1655 that the VOC's Siam trade had decreased considerably following the departure of Jan van Muijden. Osoet certainly did the Company no harm, quite the contrary.

### Osoet's legacy

Mixed-race families were common in Ayutthaya, though jurisdiction over the children often led to bitter and protracted disputes, particularly between the Siamese kings and representatives of the VOC. Siamese law generally forbade VOC employees (and other foreign traders) to take their children by local women with them on being transferred. The VOC's own policy with regard to the children was unambiguous; the employees were not permitted to return to Holland until their offspring were safely installed in the Company's orphanage in Batavia.

Although Osoet Pegu left a sizeable albeit disorganized estate, there was a moment when it looked like her children would not inherit her wealth because of the attempts by Siamese nobles to get hold of it. Johan, Osoet's son by Jan van Meerwijk was born in Siam (Tenasserim) and was later employed by the VOC.<sup>17</sup> In 1658, shortly after his mother's passing, Johan arrived in Ayutthaya. The Siamese mandarins, disgruntled at having the son's share of the estate slip through their fingers, sought to deprive him of his mother's inheritance. However, the King proved magnanimous and ordered Osoet's property to go directly to her four children (Johan and Osoet's three daughters), a royal intervention crucial to safeguarding their inheritance. The VOC brokers were also told in private that

if the governor-general put in a request, the King would allow Osoet Pegu's children to leave for Batavia.<sup>18</sup> And so, her four half-Dutch children left Siam, never to be heard of again.<sup>19</sup> Osoet Pegu's grave can likely still be found in the Dutch cemetery in old Ayutthaya. Osoet's story, however incomplete, will hopefully assure her of a much-deserved place in the history of Siam and the VOC.

Wil O. Dijk,  
former Fellow at the International  
Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS)  
wil.dijk@casema.nl

#### Notes

- VOC 1175, Rijckloff van Goens' report on the Siam office to g.g. Carel Reniers, 8 January 1651, Kraan pp.63-4.
- The information available allows us to estimate her age and that of her children, give or take a year or two: 1615 - born in Ayutthaya to Burmese /Mon parents; 1631 - aged 16, took up with Jan van Meerwijk; 1632 - aged 17, bore Jan van Meerwijk's son Johan (Jan van Meerwijk was murdered in Burma in 1634 or 1635); 1636 - aged 21, took up with Jeremias van Vliet; 1638 - aged 23, gave birth to Maria, their eldest child; 1640 - Osoet, aged 25, had by now borne Van Vliet three daughters (Jeremias van Vliet left Siam for good in 1641); 1646 - aged 31, took up with 25 year old Jan van Muijden (Van Muijden left Siam in disgrace in 1650); 1658 - Osoet Pegu dies in Ayutthaya about 43 years old.
- VOC 1227, ff. 446-446v, Jan van Rijck and Enoch Poolvoet in Siam to Joan Maetsuijcker in Batavia, 13 November 1658; Heecq left us a vivid eye-witness account of Siamese cremations: *Gijsbert Heecq's Journal*, 1655, p.68.
- Dhiravat na Pombejra. 1992. *Court, Company, and Campong: Essays on the VOC presence in Ayutthaya*, p.21.
- Watson Andaya, B. 2000. *Other Pasts: Women, Gender and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, p.20.
- Dagberegister, 14-16 March 1636, p.42.
- ibid. note 1; see also, Dhiravat na Pombejra. 2000. 'VOC Employees and their Relationship with Mon and Siamese Women: A case Study of Osoet Pegu', in Watson Andaya, B. (ed.) *Other Pasts: Women, Gender and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, p.205.
- ibid. Dhiravat na Pombejra, 2000, p.206; see also VOC 1153, f. 521, Jeremias van Vliet in Melaka to Phrakhlang, 7 June 1645; VOC 1153, ff. 518-518v, Jeremias van Vliet in Melaka to Reijnier van Tzum in Siam, 11 June 1645.
- ibid. note 1
- KA 773, G.G. to Jan van Muijden 15 September 1646; KA 1061, Jan van Muijden to G.G. 15 November 1646; KA 1067, G.M. 26 January 1649; KA 778, G.G. to Hendrick Craijers 31 July 1651; KA 1117, Jan van Rijck to G.G. 11 February 1658; VOC 883, ff. 701-702, Batavia to King Narai, 29 August 1659; KA 1123, Jan van Rijck to G.G. 11 February 1660; G.M. 20 January 1651, pp.449-450. See also Smith, G.V. 1977. *The Dutch in Seventeenth-Century Thailand*. Northern Illinois University, pp.101-102; van Opstall, M.E. 1985. 'From Alkmaar to Ayudhya and Back', *Itinerario* 9(2):111-112.
- KA 1066, Pieter de Goijer and Jan van Muijden to G.G. 25 October 1648; VOC 874, Instructie Van Goens 21 September 1650.
- ibid note 1.
- VOC 1170, ff. 824v-825, Pieter de Gooijer's report to g.g. Cornelis van der Lijn 13 January 1649.
- VOC 1175, F. 521 verso, Van Goens to G.G., 22 November 1650; ibid note 1; VOC 1197, Westerwolt to G.G. 8 November 1653, f. 479 and verso; ibid Dhiravat na Pombejra, 1992, pp.10-11.
- ibid. note 1.
- Ottow, W.M. 1954. *Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens, de carriere van een diplomaat, 1619-1655*, pp.94, 99-106.
- Gijsbert Heecq's Journal*, 1655, pp.61, 88; VOC 883, ff. 701-702, G.G. and Council to the King of Siam, 29 August 1659.
- ibid. note 2.
- VOC 1240, Jan van Rijck in Siam to g.g. Joan Maetsuijcker in Batavia, 22 February 1662, pp.306-7.

# Knock, knock! The great success of ideophones in Korean journalism

Cristina Bahón-Arnaiz



**Korean is an extremely phono-symbolic language, whereby the sounds themselves carry meaning. One of the biggest challenges when learning Korean is to understand and fully utilize this subtle character of the language, yet most non-native speakers will acknowledge the absolute importance of mastering this skill. For example, becoming proficient in the use of what are known as ideophones is vital for effective communication since a breadth of meanings and emotions are condensed into one word or phrase. Ideophones, although found in most languages, are particularly abundant in Korean; and unlike in most languages, in Korean, ideophones are even commonly used in more formal contexts, such as Newspaper headlines.**

## Scope and language register

An onomatopoeia imitates a sound perceived by the human auditory system (crash, quack, shush, etc.), whilst an ideophone is a sound-symbolic word that produces a sensory description, i.e., the sound of the word denotes an idea (squidgy, zigzag, flutter, etc.). By evoking sensations, impressions, states, or emotions, ideophones build an emotional intermediary between the speaker and the listener.

There is an extensive repertoire of ideophones across the globe, including in East Asia, especially Korea and Japan, in Southeast Asia, particularly in Vietnam and Cambodia, and also in Central Africa. Despite the presence of ideophones in many languages, including English, there are important differences regarding the scope and the language register they are associated with. For example, countries with a modest or marginal usage of these words often associate ideophones with conversational, immature and vulgar scopes, or relate them to low registers of the language. However, Korean ideophones are applied in formal and informal registers, in both speaking and writing language. They are found in *manhwa* [webtoons], novels, social media, newspapers, informal speech and formal speech, being possibly only absent from official documents.

## Ideophones in Korean newspapers

It is extremely rare to find ideophones in European newspapers. Even though headlines can be observed to feature short words, with a minimal inclusion of verbs, articles, word play, noun string and alliteration, the information in newspapers must be clearly organized, the language mostly formal and cultivated, sentences simple and coherent, not to mention the importance of a good journalistic style with a rich variety of vocabulary and a rigorous narrative structure.

In contrast, ideophones can be easily found in South Korean newspapers, in both the headlines and throughout the article itself. This is not a matter of journalistic quality. Korea's main newspapers – *Kukmin Ilbo*, *Segye Ilbo*, *Maeil Gyeongje*, *JoongAng Ilbo* or *Chosun Ilbo*, among others – publish daily articles in which ideophones play a relevant role, especially when they are used in the headline. The examples provided here are only a few of the wide uses of these sound-symbolic terms in Korean journalism, more specifically, in newspaper headlines.

*Kukmin Ilbo* recently published the article “Baekbeon jilleodo, 90do gayeolhaedo ‘meoljjeong’... I jugil nomui korona” (백번 찔러도, 90도 가열해도 ‘덜짱’...이 죽일 놈의 코로나). (fig.1) This headline literally means: “Even if you stab it a hundred times or heat it up to 90 degrees, it’s still ‘fine’ ... this damn Coronavirus”. Not only is the ideophone *meoljjeong* (덜짱) used, it is also emphasized with quotation marks. This polysemic word refers to something that remains intact, unscathed, sane or sober. Furthermore, it evokes in the receiver a particular feeling of strength, lucidity, power or robustness, which seems unstoppable or invincible. Thus, this ideophone conveys the sense that the Coronavirus remains unscathed and seems invincible. Ideophones have an extraordinary descriptive power that allows receivers to develop a deep emotional understanding of the message the headline is conveying.

The main objective of newspaper headlines is to attract and have an impact on the readers. They must be short and simple, yet attractive and impressive. Ideophones are equipped with all these features: they are short yet splendidly descriptive, and impressive in their ability to evoke emotional reactions and impressions. *JoongAng Ilbo* published an article on the recent US elections with the headline, “Bundanwi eopchirakdwichirak Tteureompeu, nambu seonbelteu daebubun dwijibeotda”

(분단위 엇치락뒤치락...트럼프, 남부 선벨트 대부분 뒤집었다); (fig.2) literally translated as: “Up and down minute by minute ... Trump flips most of the Southern Sun Belt”. The ideophone *eopchirakdwichirak* (엇치락뒤치락) has two contrasting, yet parallel meanings. It describes a person who tosses and turns in bed, unable to sleep, and it also depicts a dingdong, a race, a close game or a fight at close quarters. It expresses a continuous change of positions: up and down. At the beginning of counting the votes for the US presidential elections, it was difficult to predict the winner, since the results changed every single minute. The one word, *eopchirakdwichirak* (엇치락뒤치락), perfectly denotes both the flip-flopping and the struggle.

*Chosun Ilbo* issued the article “Baideun seungnihameon dakgogi-gematsal tteunda? Harim-Hanseong juga ‘deulsseok’” (바이든 승리하면 닭고기-게맛살 뜬다? 하림-한성 주가 ‘들썩’); literally: “If Biden wins will the price of chicken and crab rise? Harim and Hansung stock prices ‘soar’”. The ideophone *deulsseok* (들썩) describes an object stuck to something else, and thereby easily lifted, yet also evokes a feeling of flutter and excitement. It is astounding how one single word, formed by two syllables, can comprise a wide variety of implications, sensations and impressions. Again, the ideophone is enclosed by quotation marks to attract the reader’s attention and emphasize its meaning.

There are some cases where two ideophones are used in one headline. For example, *Segye Ilbo* issued the article “Gwangwangjineun bukjeok, maseukeuneun ‘hwik’... jijeokgamnyeom jaehwaksan uryeo” (관광지는 북적, 마스크는 ‘획’... 지역감염 재확산 우려), translated as “The tourist spots are crowded, the masks are ‘off’... Regional infection proliferation is being worried about”. *Bukjeok* (북적) describes the sound of people moving and noisily talking. It is normally

translated as crowded, yet it is more sensorial than that. *Hwik* (획), as most ideophones, is polysemic (it can have multiple meanings depending on the context). Normally it symbolizes the sudden and strong sound of an object flapping in the wind. However, here it equates that sound with the one made when energetically removing a face mask.

*Maeil Gyeongje* is one of the main economic newspapers in South Korea. Recently, it published the article “Peolpeol kkeulleun Busan jiggap, seokdalsae 10eok ‘ssuk’” (펄펄 끓는 부산 집값, 석달새 10억 ‘쑥’), or: “Boiling Busan house prices, 1 billion ‘rise’ in three months”. Two ideophones have been used in this short headline. *Peolpeol* (펄펄) describes something boiling or burning with intensity; *ssuk* (쑥) expresses something being boosted abruptly. Ideophones convey clear images as they create emotionally charged sensations and impressions. In addition, ideophones’ simple yet expressive and rhythmical features have the added ability of capturing the readers’ attention and to motivate them to keep reading.

Despite the marginal use of ideophones in formal contexts in European languages, especially in comparison with Asian or African languages, these illustrative words are widely used in all registers of the language in Korean, including in the official arena of newspapers. Ideophones are commonly used in Korean journalism to draw attention to headlines and connect with the reader emotionally. This highlights the significant role of these words in Korean, and the necessity to properly introduce ideophones when teaching Korean as a foreign language.

**Cristina Bahón-Arnaiz**

is a visiting Korean language professor at the Autonomous University of Madrid. Her PhD thesis was related to the linguistic and literary aspects of Korean ideophones [cristina.bahon@uam.es](mailto:cristina.bahon@uam.es)

Fig. 1 (top): *Kukmin Ilbo* “Baekbeon jilleodo, 90do gayeolhaedo ‘meoljjeong’... I jugil nomui korona” <http://news.kmib.co.kr/article/view.asp?arcid=00150289458&code=61151611&sid1=eco&cp=mv2>  
Fig. 2 (above right): *JoongAng Ilbo* “Bundanwi eopchirakdwichirak Tteureompeu, nambu seonbelteu daebubun dwijibeotda” <https://news.joins.com/article/23911611>



# Creative ways to help believers

Indonesian female Islamic leaders offer COVID-19 relief to families under pressure

Mirjam Künkler and Eva F. Nisa

As global infection levels continue to rise (total deaths approximated 2.4 million by February this year), societies have been hard hit by mounting economic, political and social costs. In Indonesia, while President Jokowi and his government were criticised for their slow initial response to the crisis, many have applauded the more efficient responses by local leaders, who quickly imposed distancing measures and encouraged mask-wearing. Unfortunately, the economic hardship, faced by many Indonesians even before the crisis, has limited people's capacity to confine themselves to the home, minimise human contact, and purchase recommended medical supplies.

Civil society actors have stepped in to complement public sector programmes, and have offered life-saving services in areas where the state has been largely absent. The country's multi-million member Islamic organisations have also put in their share, hoping to cushion some of the economic fallout. Such efforts mirror similar engagements by Islamic organisations elsewhere in the Muslim world, aiming to deliver the kind of relief and support not provided by the public sector.

## Addressing the gendered impact of COVID-19

Indonesia has stood out for the overwhelming response of *ulama perempuan* [female Islamic authorities] and women's religious organisations in addressing the gendered dimension of the pandemic. Female Islamic leaders have seized the opportunity to step in and offer their services to the broader public by issuing fatwas against domestic violence,<sup>1</sup> giving lectures on how to preserve and strengthen mental health, and offering practical support to alleviate financial hardship.

UN Women has collected data from various countries that documents the extent to which violence against women and girls has intensified during the pandemic. In addition, in April-May 2020, Indonesia's National Commission on Violence against Women (KOMNAS) conducted a survey to map the impact of the pandemic on household dynamics in 34 provinces.<sup>2</sup> The results reveal that women aged 31-40 years, especially those from lower classes, are particularly vulnerable. The survey also found that only 10% of the respondents who indicated that they had experienced domestic violence had contacted the relevant service providers.<sup>3</sup>

*Ulama perempuan*, such as those from Alimat, the Congress of Indonesian Women Ulama, and young ulama of the women's subdivisions of the nation's biggest Islamic organisations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, have organised webinars and workshops on how to contain the rise of gender-based violence and reduce violence against children.<sup>4</sup> Alimatul Qibtiyah, a KOMNAS commissioner and member of the fatwa-issuing board of Muhammadiyah, commented on the precarious situation in which "sometimes a house is not a safe place for both wives and daughters".<sup>5</sup> Khofifah Indar Parawansa, governor of East Java and chairwoman of Muslimat, reinforced this statement during a webinar in which she confirmed that close to 59% of violence against women and

Female Islamic leaders in Indonesia have been devising new and creative ways to help believers cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and the myriad crises arising from it. The authors, Mirjam Künkler and Eva Nisa, interviewed some of these leaders about their various initiatives that address the gendered dimension of the social and economic consequences of the pandemic.

children occur in the household. Problems in dealing with domestic violence during the pandemic have stemmed from human mobility restrictions, which have impeded victims from reporting their cases and have kept service providers from handling cases effectively. In response, Fatayat, the young women's wing of Nahdlatul Ulama, launched a telephone hotline for complaints and consultation on domestic violence. According to Fatayat's chairwomen Anggia Ermarini, the organisation mobilises resources from its central, provincial and district levels, in order to address the crisis.<sup>6</sup>

## Spiritual, mental, and physical resilience

Digital media has become a key communication tool between religious leaders and constituents in Indonesia. What scholars and local activists call 'digital religion' has become more visible and accessible, and Muslim female activists have embraced the new technology. Fatayat organises virtual Islamic study gatherings, called *Ngaji Virtual*, for its constituents, during which topics are presented through the lens of Islamic gender justice, for example, 'Building Immunity through the Improvement of Spiritual Quality within a Family'. In the same vein, Rahima, an organisation that trains *ulama perempuan*, produces YouTube videos of its female preachers addressing issues faced by Muslim women and educating the larger public during lockdown.

Other organisations are using digital media to emphasise mental health issues during the crisis. Muslimat actively advocates handling COVID-19 through a combination of scientific and spiritual approaches. Moreover, it highlights the importance of *shalawāt* and *dhikr* [prayer and meditation] during lockdown, which aligns well with the rising popularity in Indonesia of Muslim groups campaigning to revive inward-looking spiritual approaches and practices.<sup>7</sup> Muslimat published videos of *shalawāt li khamsatun* and *ṭibbil qulūb*, recited by its chairwoman Khofifah Indar Parawansa. The *shalawāt* aims to boost people's confidence in facing the pandemic by heeding medical protocols and maintaining spirituality through the recitation of prayers. Khofifah received an award from the Ministry of Religious Affairs in recognition of the impact made by her *shalawāt* campaign.

The organisations also focus on disseminating sound information and countering false claims about the disease. In remote areas, *jamu* [herbal medicine] sellers have been mobilised to publicise information on maintaining hygiene, and to distribute hand sanitisers and herbs, particularly to groups for whom commercial medicine is too costly. Some have established online portals to circulate traditional recipes and to reduce reliance on instant ingredients. To address rising food

costs, women leaders in Islamic boarding schools have initiated local seed-sharing programmes. As many men are currently forced into isolation in their workplace, thereby separated from their families, these organisations encourage them to cook, and to do so with vegetables and herbs that they can easily grow on a small patch of land. Home-grown greens, which can be cultivated even in urban settings, are emphasised for their potency in alleviating the effects of depression and psychiatric disorders.

Some organisations, such as the Alliance of Theologically Educated Women (PERUATI), organise fundraisers to financially help those most in need, while others, such as *Libu Perempuan Palu* [Learning Circle for Women] focus on people stranded far from home due to the pandemic and who are often living in temporary shelters. At the Islamic State University Jakarta, an organisation led by women religious leaders has raised funds for students who can no longer rely on their families for financial support.

On the epidemiological level, women activists have urged the authorities to include gender-sensitive medical data at all administrative levels, from the national down to the village. Women from many of the aforementioned organisations serve as representatives on the national COVID-19 task force. In that role, they have consistently stressed the ways in which women are particularly burdened by the COVID-19 crisis, and how policies must respond accordingly. In most cases, women have been the key link between civil society organisations and families, collecting data on health (including infection levels and treatments) and other problems faced by families, disseminating scientific information, and communicating economic opportunities.

## Conclusion

Women and girls have been particularly vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rising levels of domestic violence have accompanied increasing economic hardship in households, worsened by women's financial dependence and unemployment. *Ulama perempuan* and Muslim women's organisations have been on the frontline supporting women through various initiatives: reaching out online to provide spiritual guidance, creating scientific information programmes, supplying face masks and hand sanitiser, and generating more sustainable aid through empowerment programmes rooted in religious practices. Spiritual, mental and physical resilience comprises the foundation of these women's initiatives, while 'digital religion' enables the execution of such activities.

In the face of myriad of crises, women's Islamic organisations and the *ulama perempuan* of Indonesia practice what they preach. As Pera Sopariyanti, head of Rahima,



Above: Promotional flyer for a Ngaji Virtual event organised by Fatayat

noted: "*ulama perempuan* have proven the agents of change in their communities. During the pandemic, they have shown their initiatives to synergise with various parties to serve their communities: young and old, women and men".<sup>8</sup> As the Indonesian saying goes, 'Berakit-rakit ke hulu, berenang-renang ke tepian. Bersakit-sakit dahulu, bersenang-senang kemudian'. Directly translated as 'Raft upstream, swim to the shore. Pain will come first, joy will come later', we can take this to mean that hard work will eventually be rewarded by rescue and salvation. In the pandemic, women religious leaders have been able to demonstrate that it is not only male *ulama* who can provide the raft.

Mirjam Künkler is research professor at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study. Her focus is on Islamic law, Islamic political thought and female religious authority in Iran and Indonesia. Among her publications are *Democracy and Islam in Indonesia* (Columbia University Press, 2013) and *A Secular Age beyond the West* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). [mirjam.kuenkler@gmail.com](mailto:mirjam.kuenkler@gmail.com)

Eva F. Nisa is a senior lecturer in anthropology at the Australian National University and an Australian Research Council DECRA Fellow. Prior to this, she was a lecturer in religious studies (Islamic studies) at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Her research focuses on Islam and Muslim societies, gender and youth, religion and media (social media), and Islamic cultural economy. [eva.nisa@anu.edu.au](mailto:eva.nisa@anu.edu.au)

## Notes

- 1 The phenomenon of women issuing fatwas is extremely rare in the Muslim world and a relatively recent development in Indonesia that we have written about previously in: Künkler, M. & Nisa, E.F. 2018. 'Re-Establishing Juristic Expertise. A historic congress of female Islamic scholars', *The Newsletter* #79, p.7; <https://tinyurl.com/NL79-Kunkler-Nisa>
- 2 Bayhaqi, A. 2020. 'Survei Indikator: Kinerja Pemerintah Pusat di Bawah Daerah dalam Menangani COVID-19', *Merdeka*, 20 August; <http://tiny.cc/BayhaqiSurveiIndikator>
- 3 The survey had 2285 respondents. It needs to be noted that this survey was conducted online and thus excluded people without internet access. Even in normal times fewer than 40% of women experiencing violence seek help. See <http://tiny.cc/UNWomenFandF>.
- 4 Interview with Ala'i Nadjib, lecturer at State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and board member of Nahdlatul Ulama's Institute for Research and Human Resource Development, 1 October 2020.
- 5 <http://tiny.cc/webinarAlimatul>
- 6 Interview with Anggia Ermarini, general chairwoman of the central board of Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama, 1 October 2020.
- 7 Howell, J.D. 2014. 'Revitalised Sufism and the New Piety Movements in Islamic Southeast Asia', in B.S. Turner & O. Saleemink (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia*. Routledge, pp.276-292.
- 8 Interview with Pera Sopariyanti and Andi Faizah, 1 October 2020.



Left: Jokowi confronts the COVID-19 virus spreading over the Indonesian flag. Source: Hapelinium on Shutterstock.com, all rights reserved.

Below: Cover of *Indonésie: l'envol mouvementé du Garuda* by Jean-Luc Maurer.



# Indonesia in '3D': development, dictatorship and democracy

Jean-Luc Maurer

## Ambitious objective

In the introduction, some methodological clarifications are followed by a short presentation of Indonesia's favourable situation at the beginning of 2020. After a first chapter to set the geographical and the pre-colonial scene, followed by a second on the heavy heritage of 350 years of Dutch colonial domination, it focuses on the post independence period with a different chapter devoted to each of the five major phases one can distinguish since 1950: the troubled Sukarno years of political instability and economic decline (1950-1966); the New Order authoritarian era of economic development and political repression under Suharto's dictatorship (1966-1998); the chaotic but decisive transition to democracy known as *Reformasi* (1998-2004); the decade of economic stability and democratic stagnation during which Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono was president (2004-2014); and the six years that have elapsed since Joko Widodo was elected in 2014 and re-elected in 2019 to the presidency, where clear signs of democratic regression have started to accumulate amidst a positive economic situation until early 2020. The book ends with an epilogue showing how this favourable situation has turned to a deep economic and social crisis due to the irruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was managed inefficiently, as well as the consequences it had on the acceleration of democratic regression. However, it is preceded by a conclusion drawing the lessons from the Indonesian development process and stressing the possible links one can establish with the phases of dictatorship or democracy the country has known, including a brief comparison with the four other co-founding ASEAN members, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines.

On 17 August 2020, while the COVID-19 pandemic was raging, Indonesia celebrated less joyfully than planned the 75th anniversary of its independence. With more than 270 million people, it is the fourth most populated country in the world. It is also at the crossroads of the Indo-Pacific region where it occupies a uniquely strategic position. On the political front, it is the third largest democracy on earth and one of the few in the Muslim world to which it belongs, also counting the highest number of believers. At the economic level, well endowed with natural resources, it is one of the major emerging countries, with a rather good development record since the early 1970s, a member of the G20, and will possibly be the fourth or fifth biggest economy in the world by 2045, at which time it will be celebrating its centenary. In spite of all that, Indonesia remains certainly the most unknown and ignored among major nations. This article is a summary of a French-language book whose title can translate as "Indonesia: Garuda's turbulent take-off".<sup>1</sup> It aims to fill part of a knowledge gap about this country, particularly marked in the French literature. Its main objective is to retrace the history of the archipelago's economic, social and political development.

However, the book also has a second, wider and more ambitious objective: to allow the reader, through what is considered as the emblematic case of Indonesia, to better understand the dynamics of development, this global process of change resulting in a nation's economic, social, political and cultural transformation. The emblematic nature of the case study is not only linked to the fact that Indonesia started from a very low level of development and has reached a certain degree of success in this domain, but also to the complex and ambiguous relation that this process has entertained with dictatorship and democracy, the two political regimes between which the country has wavered since independence. As a matter of fact, this analysis of the relation in '3D' between development, dictatorship and democracy constitutes the connecting thread of the book, with the ambition to clarify the following haunting question: which of the two political regimes has been more efficient in terms of economic and social development?

## Sukarno: polarisation and recession

After independence, proclaimed in 1945, and the four following years of a devastating national liberation war against the colonial power, Indonesia went through two very different political experiences under the presidency of Sukarno from 1950 to 1966: the first was rather democratic and the second clearly more authoritarian. Neither of these two experiences put the country on the path of sustained economic and social development. Until 1959, in spite of the huge difficulties met from the start – resulting from the burden of colonial heritage, the iniquitous conditions for decolonisation imposed by the Dutch and the very poor state of the economy – the country seemed able to engage in a promising developmental process. However, the political instability inherent in the commendable but probably premature attempt to establish a regime of western-inspired parliamentary liberal democracy,

ill-adapted to traditional Indonesian political culture, proved to be a major obstacle. Moreover, the difficulty to forge national unity and the various regional rebellions during the 1950's in different parts of the archipelago monopolised all the energy and derailed this developmental process. In the end, parliamentary democracy resulted in a serious development failure.

Thereafter, in 1959 Sukarno imposed his system of Guided Democracy, a presidential regime that was increasingly authoritarian and incompetent, giving priority to foreign policy objectives of national sovereignty claims and struggle against neo-colonialism and imperialism, but neglecting economic fundamentals. The economy became a victim of economic nationalism, nonsensical planning and inept strategic choices guided by ideology and ignorance and reflecting the lack of concern by the president for such issues. This policy drove the country towards economic recession and resulted in a serious deterioration of living conditions for the population. To sum

up, the first fifteen years of independence ended up in a severe developmental fiasco. In 1965, economic growth was close to zero, inflation was over 600%, around 70% of the population lived in poverty and hunger was common, with a rice deficit of 1 million tons. The degradation of the economic and social situation was accompanied by the rise of political antagonism between the Indonesian Communist Party, who supported Sukarno's policy, and the majority of the army's US-trained higher officers, allied to Islamic conservative circles, who were opposed to it. This growing polarisation blew up at the end of September 1965 when Indonesia was precipitated into a terrible episode of violence that resulted in the slaughter of at least half a million people, one of the worst and still unexplained and unpunished mass killings of the second half of the 20th Century.

### Spectacular progress. At what cost?

After this awful holocaust, in March 1966 Indonesia fell for 32 years under the domination of a harsh authoritarian regime established by General Suharto and baptised New Order. Starting as a pure military dictatorship, it used and abused coercive measures during these three decades. But it also initiated an undisputable process of economic and social development that Indonesia had been waiting for since independence. Even if one must consider statistics with a critical eye, the main development indicators show that economic growth remained high under the New Order, varying between 5 and 10% a year, and was accompanied by spectacular progress on the social front. Thus, between 1966 and 1996, GDP per capita was multiplied by more than twenty (from around 50 US\$ to more than 1000), life expectancy gained almost 15 years (from 50 to 65) and absolute poverty was quartered (from some 60% to 15%). Education and health indicators substantially improved too. It is certainly exaggerated and inappropriate to depict this as a shining developmental success when one considers the cost of this experience in terms of violence, contempt for the rule of law and deprivation of political and individual rights, without mentioning the assault on the environment. But it is difficult to contest the fact that this authoritarian regime succeeded in pulling Indonesia out of its chronic underdevelopment. It even lifted it into the group of HPAEs (High Performing Asian Economies), participating in the so-called 'East Asian Miracle' praised by the famous World Bank report of 1993.

Thus, the political authoritarianism of the New Order regime seems to have been relatively favourable to Indonesia's economic and social development. It is consistent with the classical modernisation theory, some of its most radical advocates having even supported the idea that the army can constitute a key accelerator in a developmental process. However, quantitative figures do not say much about the quality of this process and even less about the real life of Indonesian citizens, deprived of the elementary but fundamental freedom they could have enjoyed under a democratic regime. The elections organised every five years and skilfully manipulated to obtain a large victory for the governmental party cannot be considered as a true democratic expression of trust. On the other hand, one can also observe that different forms of popular protest against the regime gained force over time. They culminated at the end of the New Order, when it became unable to 'deliver' economic and social progress. But it is the initial success of this developmental process that finally made it possible for these dissenting voices to express themselves, grow in importance and make change possible. To a certain extent, the New Order was a victim of its own success. It was the improvement of the living standards of the population (nutrition, clothing, housing, transport, education, health, communication, information, etc.), alongside the spectacular decline of absolute poverty, that allowed the emergence of a middle class longing for more freedom, as well as a student movement and a working class ready to take risks and fight for a better life.

### A demand for democratic reform

This is precisely what happened in 1998. The Asian Financial Crisis (AFC), which started in Thailand in mid-1997 and reached Indonesia at the end of the year, served as a catalyst for this movement of revolt and opened the era of reforms, leading to a rapid and genuine democratisation of the country. The collapse of the economy, dragged into a 13% contraction in 1998, bringing the bankruptcy of thousands of enterprises and the explosion of social problems, with millions of people losing their jobs and a poverty rate jumping to over 20%, resulted in a deep political crisis. It is when the 'miracle' turned into a 'debacle'. The New Order's only political legitimacy lay in its capacity to continue ensuring economic and social development. This being gone, it collapsed in the face of social unrest and the demands of the population for freedom and democracy. General Suharto resigned pitifully in May 1998. Starting from the experience of Indonesia (and other Asian countries like Thailand and South Korea at the same moment), one can conclude that economic and social development gives birth to democracy more easily when it turns into a crisis, when the process of global change that was operating is suddenly interrupted.

It is more difficult to draw clear conclusions on the relation in '3D' for the troubled period of democratic transition between 1998 and 2004. In fact, it comes down to two questions: how can a transition between dictatorship and democracy take place and what are the conditions for economic and social development in a time of crisis?

To answer the first question, let us say that these six years of *Reformasi* were certainly the most difficult and dangerous for the young Indonesian democracy. In reality, Indonesia almost blew up due to violent regional and religious conflicts. The process of democratisation could have been interrupted at any moment, bringing the country back to authoritarianism. However, thanks to the actions of the three political figures successively appointed to the presidency – B.J. Habibie (1998-99), Abdurrahman Wahid (1999-2001) and Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001-2004) – arduous progress has been achieved towards democracy. However, the simple fact that Indonesia had three presidents in just six years, while it had only had two in more than half a century of independence, gives an idea of the difficulties that were faced. Indeed, these very different characters, who came to power unexpectedly and exercised it for a short time, contributed to this laborious consolidation of democracy. All the institutional reforms they signed (political and press freedom, rights of association, decentralisation laws, independence of East-Timor, reduction of army role, adoption of direct elections at all levels, etc.) made it possible for the country to progress in the right direction. One can even say that the most difficult part was achieved under their leadership and that their successor inherited a situation that was as favourable as possible.

### Recovery with inequalities

As for the second question, it is obvious that reform frenzy, political instability, the threat of national disintegration and the beginning of a deadly wave of Islamic terrorism during this period, did not facilitate the return to favourable conditions for economic and social development. However, considering the true cataclysm that the AFC had been for Indonesia in 1997-98, one can imagine that things could have turned much worse. It was miraculous that six years later the country could retrieve a respectable 5% economic growth and a whole set of social indicators rapidly catching up with pre-crisis levels. Maybe it is due to the fact that this critical period facilitated a better mobilisation of efforts and stimulation of imagination, allowing the emergence of a multitude of

new actors coming from civil society and freeing talents that were dormant until that time? Sometimes, a crisis can be beneficial to put back on track a country that was close to derailing. In any case, here too the successor of the unlikely trio inherited in 2004 a largely improved situation that made it possible to see the future with optimism.

During the decade (2004 to 2014) when president Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) was in place, one first saw a deepening process of democratisation take place, before registering the disturbing beginning of democratic stagnation during the second half of his appointment. It had no real impact on economic growth, maintained at a yearly pace of 5-6% and accompanied by a return to poverty decline, but also by a significant increase of income inequality.

If one examines in more detail the evolution of the situation during this decade, what are the main lessons to be drawn with regard to the '3D' relation at the heart of our concern? It appears first that democratisation was favourable to the economic and social development, allowing a return to stability, a respectable growth rate and a substantial improvement of living standards for the majority of the population. But being inscribed in a more general context of globalisation and accelerated liberalisation, the same democratisation process has also entailed the rise of social inequalities and the widening of the gap between a minority of privileged people becoming infinitely richer, and the majority of a population remaining just slightly less poor.

### Liberalism, conservatism, and populism

Moreover, democratisation, and the liberalisation of the society it has allowed with the reinforcement of people's political and civil rights, has also triggered the rise of a growing hostility among the more conservative sections of the population, for the most part linked to Islamic circles. They are opposed to this change and cultivate the nostalgia of authoritarianism, a period of time when law and order was the rule and when things were clearer, even if it often degenerated in serious excesses. In fact, as it has appeared since then even more obviously, a rapid democratisation process of the type that has characterised Indonesia during the time of *Reformasi* generates its own natural poison. This political process of change is threatened by the resurgence of intolerance and populism as well as by the emergence of repressive 'illiberal' practices. It becomes truly serious when several political leaders belonging to this trend support the idea that democracy would constitute an obstacle to economic and social development. In their view, the pace of development could be much quicker, and its results better, under an authoritarian regime, as it was during the New Order. Thus, by the end of SBY's second term, Indonesia was confronted with the dilemma of development being torn between the necessity to reinforce democracy and the temptation of a return to authoritarianism.

The phenomenon of democratic stagnation, which started under SBY, has been confirmed since the arrival to the presidency in 2014 of the unexpected Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and his re-election in 2019. The young Indonesian democracy has even started to show signs of regression in some domains, like the respect for the rule of law or the struggle against corruption. What some scholars consider to be an 'illiberal drift' did not have any notable effect on economic growth. It has remained resolutely fixed at the usual yearly 5% rate, in spite of the reforms undertaken by the president to boost development, among other things through the improvement of infrastructure. In addition, poverty has continued to decrease and inequality has ceased to increase, even showing signs of a slight decline. However,

having announced at the start of his second mandate that development would be his first priority and that he was aiming for a yearly growth rate of 7-8% by 2024, Jokowi has instilled the pernicious idea that a deepening of democracy constituted an obstacle to reaching his development goals.

This presidential position is worrying. Some ministers are even defending the idea that democracy and its major conquests – direct elections, including for the presidency, respect for the rule of law, as well as individual and collective human rights, and above all the struggle against corruption – are impediments to development and security. Indeed, the government gives a disproportionate priority to the preservation of internal security and to the respect for national sovereignty on the international front. This has naturally resulted in the return of the army in politics, the growing influence of conservative Islamic political parties or organisations, and the rise of religious radicalism and intolerance, leading to an increasing degree of illiberalism. It corresponds to a certain weariness of the population in front of the unfulfilled promises of democracy and the resurgence of a true nostalgia for the 'good old days' when everything was clearer, easier and better. Yet, one talks about Suharto's dictatorial New Order whose exactions seem to have been forgotten by a population that is mostly too young to have suffered through it.

### Closing the loop on democracy

One comes therefore to a paradoxical reversal of history where, after it has been the fruit of a rapid and successful economic and social development conducted by a dictatorial regime that tried hard to avoid its advent, democracy comes to be considered, after a mere twenty years of existence, as an obstacle to the acceleration of the developmental process. In such a simplistic vision, too much democracy would kill development! Then, the question remains to know whether the Indonesian democracy will continue to weaken and eventually fade away, in the name of a faster development. Can one imagine that the quest for a higher level of development results in the end of democracy and the return to authoritarianism and possibly to dictatorship? The loop would be sadly closed. Depending on the turn events will take until the end of Jokowi's second mandate, it is unfortunately quite possible.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started to infect Indonesia in mid-March 2020, and had already passed the 30,000 deaths mark in early February 2021 has naturally turned the situation totally upside down, like everywhere else on earth. The economy has collapsed here too. Instead of the 6-7% growth rate hoped for by the president, the country will register a contraction of around 2% in 2020, the first since 1998 at the time of the AFC. Unemployment, poverty and inequality are on the rise again. The ambitious development objectives Jokowi had set have been postponed or even abandoned, to make place for a huge rescue financial plan at the cost of a deepening budget deficit. On the health front, the government has been inefficient in managing the crisis and Indonesia shows by far the worst performance among all ASEAN countries. At the same time, the coercive measures taken to try to control the spread of the virus have given a central role to the army and police, reinforcing the illiberal trend that was already at work. It is therefore most probable that the pandemic will further weaken democracy. The only hope is that Indonesia will manage to survive as a flawed democracy, but a democracy nevertheless, in a region increasingly dominated by authoritarian regimes.

Jean-Luc Maurer,  
Honorary Professor in Development  
Studies, The Graduate Institute Geneva  
[jean-luc.maurer@graduateinstitute.ch](mailto:jean-luc.maurer@graduateinstitute.ch)

#### Notes

1 <https://books.openedition.org/ideid/7876>

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INSTITUTE<https://www.iseas.edu.sg>

# Commodities, credit and luxury consumer goods

Insights into the structures that shape economic life in Southeast Asia

Su-Ann OH

Looking at Milo Dinosaur (a quintessentially Singaporean drink), the Musang King durian (the most sought after variety from Malaysia), moneylending in Vietnam and the demand for luxury goods in Southeast Asia, researchers in the Regional Economic Studies Programme here at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute lay bare the structures that shape economic life in the region. Through an examination of global chains, historical legacies, political economy, social relations and changing tastes brought about by the pandemic, they provide us with fascinating insights into the workings of commodity and credit markets in the region.

Su-Ann OH, Visiting Fellow at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Managing Editor of SOJOURN, and Regional Editor for The Newsletter, [oh\\_su\\_ann@iseas.edu.sg](mailto:oh_su_ann@iseas.edu.sg)

## COVID-19 and the lost immunity of the luxury goods industry

Prithish Bhattacharya

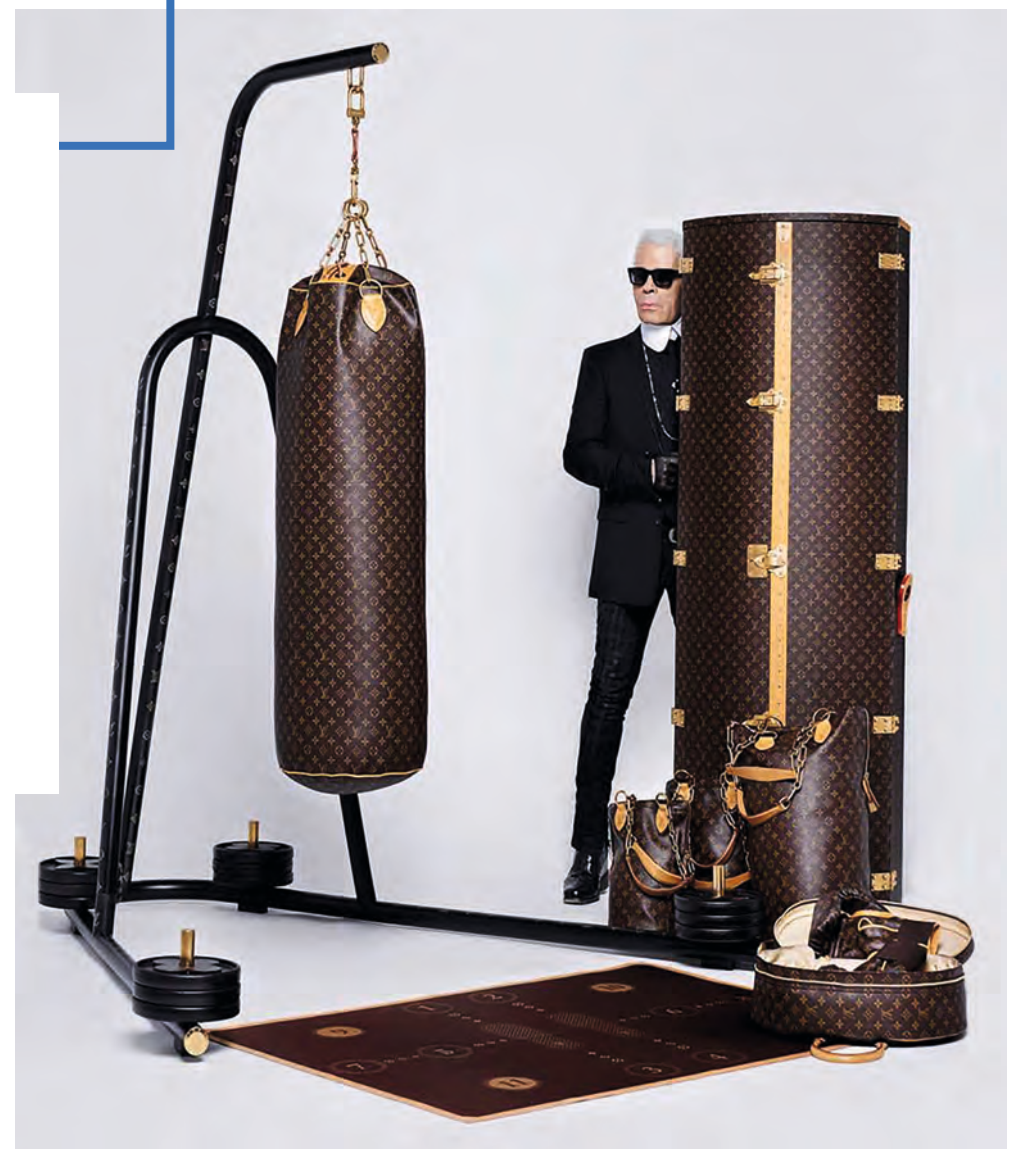
The market for luxury goods has enjoyed phenomenal growth over the past few decades. In 2019, the global value of the sector was estimated to be around a staggering US\$1.47 trillion. A carefully crafted illusion of hedonism, robust manufacturing processes and seamlessly integrated supply chains have allowed the industry to create and satiate people's perpetual appetite for high-end products and experiences with great aplomb. Even during periods of grave economic uncertainty, flagship luxury brands have emerged virtually unscathed. For instance, in the aftermath of the catastrophic Global Financial Crisis of 2008-09, the sector contracted by a mere 9 per cent, before loyal consumers promptly elevated the retail giants back to their original dominant positions by the following year. The events of 2020, however, have managed to expose a chink in the industry's armour. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant economic downturn have dealt a major blow to the generally indomitable luxury segment. According to analysts at Bain & Co., the global sales of personal luxury goods declined by 23 per cent in 2020, and are not expected to return to 2019 figures until late 2022 or 2023. Such projections do not bode well for Southeast Asia's luxury market, which had started to show signs of slowing down even before the current outbreak, thanks to the spill-over effects of the US-China trade war.

### New strategies

Since the beginning of the millennium, the luxury goods market has relied, almost exclusively, on two consumer clusters for generating overall growth. While middle class Asian tourists remain the primary revenue source, young local adults or 'Millennials' form the much smaller backup target. However, with COVID-induced travel restrictions affecting the former group and rising youth unemployment impacting the latter, demand has flatlined and the industry has been caught completely off guard. Annual sales of LVMH, the parent company of prestigious companies such as Louis Vuitton, Dior, TAG Heuer and Bulgari, plummeted 17 per cent year-on-year, while



Above: Burberry face mask.



Above: Luxury fashion brand Louis Vuitton selling exercise equipment, pictured here with couturier Karl Lagerfeld.

net profits were down by 34 per cent. Likewise, rival conglomerate Kering SA, owner of Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent, witnessed a 17.5 per cent decline in revenue, and a 34.4 drop in recurring operating income. Although pricing strategies – including setting price mark-ups sometimes as high as 20 times the cost of production for a host of products – have allowed most industry stalwarts to remain afloat during the pandemic, a handful of high-end boutique brands are starting to shutter down. Among the American casualties of the crisis are retail giants Brook Brothers, Neiman Marcus and Lord & Taylor – all three companies filed for bankruptcy last year. Closer to home, Singapore's Robinsons & Co., too, was unable to bear the brunt of the coronavirus fallout, announcing its closure after 160 years in the city-state. Other players that have come to terms with the peculiar nature of the ongoing crisis – the ease with which the virus spreads, the psyche of cautious consumers and the complexity of vaccinating billions of people – and that anticipate a long recovery process have finally started to abandon their change-averse mode of operations.

Economic homeostasis has been a signature trait of most luxury fashion houses. A self-sustaining ecosystem developed by nurturing a steady stream of loyal patrons has helped them attain unparalleled growth in the past. In order to do so, established brands

have unreservedly backed textbook notions of fuelling 'conspicuous consumption' and generating 'snob value' to help their consumers distinguish themselves from the crowd. So entrenched is the prestige preservation philosophy that large-scale commoditisation has never even been considered a viable option. However, the lasting impact of the current pandemic is making them take the first steps towards setting aside the allure of exclusivity and embracing coping mechanisms rooted in mainstream economic principles. First, a number of companies are offering existing and new customers a greater range of products and prices that would – at least somewhat – justify heavy spending in this challenging period. Second, centre stage brands are actively trying to develop a sense of congruity between consumer perception and their own values. And third, the ever-so-neglected digital engagement channels are finally being put to good use.

### Greater variety

Most luxury fashion houses have been wary of diversification due to fears of 'brand dilution'. But keeping such concerns at bay and unapologetically extending product and price ranges is now imperative for such firms. Given that recessions invariably heighten consumers' price sensitivity, catering to financially fettered

shoppers should be seen by the industry not as a deviation from its ethos of maintaining inaccessibility but as an opportunity to inculcate loyalty into a new group of consumers. This should be supplemented with detailed analyses of market trends. Preliminary studies have shown that, in Southeast Asia, younger consumers have been affected less severely by the COVID-19 crisis than their middle-aged counterparts. Not allocating adequate resources to serve their needs just because they have traditionally accounted for a smaller proportion of the revenue stream would therefore be a misstep. Instead, by offering a greater variety of goods tailored to their preferences by utilising the underlying notion of 'aspirational utility', the industry stands a good chance of creating a new, permanent consumer base in the future. Developing practical and durable goods – as exemplified by some brands that have forayed into production of reusable face masks (Burberry), exercise equipment (Louis Vuitton) and electronic gadgets (Mont Blanc) – is a brilliant move towards diversification.

### Pro-social behaviour

The literature on behavioural economics is replete with studies that highlight the idea of possessions being an expression of their owner's extended self. With the 'new normal' forcing most individuals to stay indoors and unintentionally making them reflect on 'what really matters', materialism is bound to take a hit. It is therefore important for the luxury sector to depart from its typical 'wants over needs' narrative and, instead, communicate to the buyers what it stands for. A host of new studies have shown that, in addition to the combination of willingness and ability to pay, luxury consumers now assign a lot of weightage to their preferred brands' manufacturing processes, treatment of employees, commitment to saving the environment, charitable endeavours, *inter alia*. As shoppers begin to trickle out of their homes after months of isolation to satiate their 'pent up demand' for luxury escapism, the industry must make greater effort to convince them of, say, the craftsmanship of the artists it employs, its resolve to create a truly inclusive work environment and the genuineness of its pro-social behaviour. In the early days of the COVID crisis, many big-name fashion companies had turned their production lines, usually meant for handbags and apparel, to manufacture personal protective equipment and hand sanitisers – a gesture that will undoubtedly add to their scintillating brand value.

### Digital engagement

'Experiential satisfaction' has been the essence of the luxury sector. Consequently, enhancing the operations of brick and mortar stores has been the principal focus of most high-end brands. For years, digital marketing and sales channels were implicitly labelled as weak instruments – to the extent that most brands did not even list the prices of their offerings on the official websites; in order to obtain this key piece of information, consumers were expected to call the nearest outlet. Things are much different now. The pandemic has forced the industry to elevate e-commerce sales to the same stature as outlet purchases. Luxury firms are finally adopting digital engagement to not just showcase goods and services and relay their desirability, but also receive immediate customer feedback. A growing number of firms in the region have been livestreaming fashion events, offering virtual consultations and adopting digital prototyping to unveil novel products. As social distancing measures are here to stay for at least the next several months, further digital amplification can certainly help cushion the impact of the crisis.

While these measures alone cannot restore the luxury industry's immunity overnight, they can help mitigate some of the challenges brought upon by the current crisis and prepare a new, sustainable *modus operandi* for a post-COVID scenario.

**Prithvi Bhattacharya** is a Research Officer in the Regional Economic Studies Programme at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

## A thorny dispute over land and profits. Durian plantations in Raub, Malaysia

Cassey Lee



Above: Durian night market, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Image John Tewell on Flickr, Creative Commons license.

**P**rickly, creamy and pungent, durian (*Durio zibethinus*) is regarded by many in Southeast Asia to be the king of fruits. In fact, durian's commercial value has risen in recent years, especially since it became popular in China. In 2019 alone, China imported some US\$1.7 billion worth of durians. Although Thailand dominates supply in this market, the Malaysian government aspires to increase the country's market share to well beyond the current ten per cent. Two factors are likely to increase Malaysia's durian exports to China in the future. First, Malaysia secured the rights to export frozen whole durians to China in August 2018. Second, there is increasing demand for Malaysia's premium durian, especially for a variety known as 'Musang King'.

Though the Covid-19 pandemic has adversely affected the demand for durians in China in 2020, the long-term constraint is likely to come from the supply-side rather than the demand side. Not only is there a long gestation period for durian trees (more than five years), the Musang King variety only thrives in specific geographical areas in Malaysia. One of these areas is the district of Raub, located in the state of Pahang. As the durian industry booms, durian plantation lands in Raub have become the loci of contestations among various parties. This is because many of the one thousand affected farmers have been cultivating durian on land that is state-owned.

The most recent struggle over land for durian cultivation in Raub can be traced back to March 2020, when the Pahang state government's agency for agriculture development, Perbadanan Kemajuan Pertanian Negeri Pahang (PKPP) signed agreements with a private company, the Royal Pahang Durian Group (RPD), to form joint ventures to develop a durian processing centre and to legalise durian farming on encroached state lands.

On 24 June 2020, the Pahang government awarded a 30+30 year lease and the right to use over 5,357 acres of land in Raub to the joint ventures. A month later, the affected durian farmers in Raub were given the ultimatum of accepting a sub-lease of 10+10 years with the joint venture company or risk being evicted for illegal land occupation. The proposed sub-lease contract requires each farmer to pay a levy of RM6,000 (US\$1,473) per acre and

to sell their Grade A Musang King to the joint ventures at a fixed price of RM30 (US\$7.40) per kg for two years starting from 2021. Not surprisingly, the ultimatum and proposal were met with stiff resistance by the durian farmers who felt that the state had colluded with a private company to unfairly extract their hard-earned profits. The state and the private company have not previously invested any time and resources in the farmers' ventures and yet, by way of fiat, intend to extract rent from them. The case has since gone to the courts with the farmers seeking a judicial review on two matters – the state government's order to vacate their lands and its decision to award the lease and the right to use to the joint venture company. A temporary reprieve was obtained by the farmers when the court ordered the state authorities to cease all enforcement and eviction measures against the durian farmers until the judicial review would be decided in December 2020.

At first glance, the case appears straightforward from a legal perspective. The implementation of land registration under British rule had abolished the practice of 'adverse possession', which was recognised under customary law. In adverse possession, an occupant of 'waste land' [*tanah mati*] has the right to cultivate the land provided a proportion of the produce is remitted to the rightful owner (the state). Thus, under the current legal system, the affected durian farmers have illegally occupied state-owned lands and have no legal recourse whatsoever. This would put the farmer at a disadvantage when bargaining for a more favourable lease term.

Under the Federal Constitution, land-related matters are dealt with under state jurisdiction. It would perhaps be less controversial if the entire 30+30 year lease is given to PKPP because the land does in fact belong to the state. PKPP can then provide a sub-lease to each durian farmer. Why should another private company (RPD) be a beneficiary of the lease? As a state-owned agency, PKPP should have sufficient resources to develop the industry including financing the proposed durian processing plant. As part of a sub-lease agreement with farmers, the PKPP could also assist them in obtaining the Malaysian Good Agricultural Practices (MyGAP) certification, which is required by China for durian imports. After all, it is the role of the government to assist the private sector

to overcome such non-tariff barriers. If the state government does not have the expertise nor the human resources to provide direct technical assistance to farmers on matters relating to MyGAP, it could encourage private provision of such services.

One potential complication is the involvement of the Pahang Royal Family as a shareholder in the private company RPD. The Sultan of Pahang is the de facto head of the state government. Some legal scholars and practitioners have argued that state lands 'belong' to the Sultan as a sovereign entity. This is debatable because changes in state land legislations require the approval of the state legislative body, implying that the 'state' is in fact distinct from the sovereign entity – just as the Federal legislative body (Parliament) is separate from the executive body and the king. Norms may, however, differ from actual practice as the Sultan commands the utmost respect from state bureaucrats and politicians.

On 23 December 2020, the High Court in Kuantan dismissed the farmers' applications for judicial review on the basis that they are trespassers and hence have no legal standing. This court decision is likely to be construed by the general public to be unfair. Legal constraints aside, it might be worth to consider economic efficiency. What arrangement would allow the durian industry in Raub to flourish whilst ensuring that the state government receives its fair share of revenues (lease payments, quit rents and tax revenues)? To do this, the courts should stay the 'grabbing hands' of the state and allow the 'invisible hand' of the market to do what it does best in commerce. This would require the court to recognise the right of the farmers to be fairly compensated (for past investments, should they choose to exit farming) or to a fair revenue-sharing contract (should they choose to continue farming). Such a contract should be negotiated without the threat of eviction.

To conclude, the boom in Malaysia's durian exports has brought about a conflict between major players and institutions in the country – farmers, state and the royalty. A fair solution to this conflict can only be obtained through negotiations without threat of eviction.

**Cassey Lee** is a Senior Fellow in the Regional Economic Studies Programme at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

## The gendered structure of moneylending in Vietnam

Nicolas Lainez

Moneylending is a vital source of credit for unbanked and under-banked borrowers in Vietnam. Despite its relevance, this credit sector is poorly understood and shrouded in negative stereotypes about loan shark practices. It is thought to be a masculine world, a universe of violent and cruel men belonging to *giang hồ* [outlaw] gangs that prey on the poor and use strong-arm recovery methods. However, moneylending is also a feminine domain, a world of adaptable and humane women who support their community by providing loans. The tension between 'cruelty' [*sự hung ác*] and 'sentiment' [*tình cảm*], two terms expressed by male and female moneylenders respectively, reveals the gendered structure of moneylending in Vietnam. Not only do men and women run different types of lending operations, but they do so while deploying essentialist constructions of gender for moral and economic purposes. This deployment is both normative and strategic, as it simultaneously reinforces gender ideologies and sustains business practices.

### Gangsters and fear tactics

Male moneylenders operate in gangs, which people commonly refer to as *giang hồ* [outlaw], *xã hội đen* (lit.: 'black society'; meaning gangster, or mafia) and *tụi Hải Phòng* (lit.: 'gang from Hải Phòng', a coastal city in Northern Vietnam popularly considered a hotbed of criminality). These gangs cultivate a reputation of being reckless, belligerent and cold-hearted and, in some cases, display tattoos, fancy vehicles, flashy jewellery, and stacks of cash on social media. Some of these gangs use pawnshops and rental and wholesale businesses as fronts for their operations. They lend money to a range of borrowers whom they recruit through social networks and aggressive marketing. For small unsecured loans, they do not require collateral, trust, or a prior connection with the borrower. Some ask for a photocopy of the ID or household certificate, and only occasionally keep the original document. In line with a reputation for ruthlessness, they use brutal recovery tactics. Their motto

is 'if I lend money, I can always get it back'. Their methods include charging penalties and compound interest, insults and beatings, making a fuss at borrowers' homes, harassing their relatives, disclosing the debt to a spouse, posting their pictures and personal information in their neighbourhood, and splashing paint and fermented shrimp sauce at their front door. These bullying campaigns have devastating effects on late repayers. As described in his interview with me in Ho Chi Minh City, Quyên, 40, the head of a *giang hồ* gang of five 'little brothers' involved in pawnshops and moneylending, instilling fear among borrowers is key to sustaining his operation:

"To be honest, at first, I need something to make them scared of me and make them realise if they don't pay me or they flee, they won't be able to work. I will come and make a fuss at their house and look for them everywhere. If they are still stubborn, they know that I won't hesitate to hit them. We have to work hard and sacrifice our blood and tears to make that money, so we don't give it away to people easily. I also need power. Not that I want to deal with borrowers using violence, but I want to use my power to make them scared of me, so they pay me in due course. They must know that repaying is their responsibility. If they don't pay me, it's like if they steal from me. They must be afraid of me even if I do nothing to them. I just need them to understand they must pay me back".

*Giang hồ* lenders' use of extreme violence to recover loans stirs up public indignation and concern and a strong call for political action, to which the government has responded with persecution and has used as a justification for liberalising consumer lending. However, these male lenders embrace the stereotype of the ruthless and 'evil' usurer who crushes the poor with high-interest rates and strong-arm recovery methods. They also embody the *xã hội đen* image, the greedy gangster popularised in the campaigns against 'social evils' in the 1990s, a time when it was believed by the government that the

market economy and the country's insertion into the globalised economy would set off an irreversible process of cultural dilution and cause the proliferation of crime and greed. *Giang hồ* lenders also embody certain ideals of masculinity, in particular men's 'hot temper' that can easily turn into aggressive and violent behaviour (and intimate partner violence) when they consume alcohol. Although conforming to these gender roles marginalises male moneylenders as deviant and puts them at risk of repression and stigmatisation, it allows them to generate enough fear and respect among borrowers to sustain their lending operation.

### Sympathetic familiarity

On the contrary, women operate as small-scale 'neighbourhood moneylenders'. They work individually, use savings to launch small lending ventures, and offer flexible borrowing conditions to handpicked clients. They use their extensive experience and connections to lend money in their social networks. A prerequisite to lending is familiarity with and trust in their borrowers, typically a neighbour, a friend, an acquaintance or a business partner. According to Quyên, a small-scale neighbourhood moneylender from Ho Chi Minh City, "I only lend small amounts of money, like 2-3 million đồng (USD86-129), to people I trust. I lend it to people who are very close to me or whose situation I am sympathetic to, mainly people having a small business. Even if I am known as an easy moneylender, I only lend money to people I know and trust". To issue a loan, female moneylenders need to know the borrower's work and house address, but refrain from asking for an ID or a household certificate as collateral. Once they gain experience and contacts in the moneylending trade, build their reputation and increase their capital, they expand their operation to more distant circles in their social networks. Most argue that they 'lend money for affectionate reasons' [*cho mượn tình cảm*], meaning at slightly lower rates and with more flexibility toward defaulters than *giang hồ* gangs. Nở, a neighbourhood lender, who lends money to sex workers, explained that:

"I am familiar with the girls and understand their situation, so I can't grab their money like *giang hồ* gangs do. When they don't have enough money, I go easy on them and let them slide for that month. If they aren't able to pay me double next month, I let them pay one month and wait until they have enough money to pay for the missing

month. But first, I go to their place to see how they live. If I see that they really cannot pay and are going through a hard time, I sympathise and don't force them to pay".

As flexible as neighbourhood moneylenders' practices are, they must also recoup their money to sustain their business. When they run out of patience, they harass and insult late repayers. This is how Phường, a neighbourhood moneylender, pressures late borrowers: "I can say 'fuck you or your mother, is it you or me now?', or I could use more aggressive words like 'fuck your mother, fuck your father'. I only swear at the borrowers themselves. I never insult their mother, father and ancestors". As opposed to *giang hồ* gangs, neighbourhood moneylenders rarely hit 'stubborn' borrowers or 'make a fuss' at their home and workplace. Inflicting physical violence on associates, friends and family members would damage their reputation in the neighbourhood and therefore their capacity to recruit new clients. In fact, the relationship between moneylenders like Nở and Phường and their clients is framed within the terms of reference *chị-em* or 'old sister-young sister/brother'. This referential system lends itself to the narrative of moneylending as a mark of 'good sentiments' [*tình cảm*], a term frequently used in family and close interactions. The obligation to pay back is bound not only by the terms of credit but also by the seniority and the familial relations denoted by the pair of kinship pronouns.

In brief, neighbourhood moneylenders conform to the socially and politically-derived image of the petty trader who keeps a low profile and works diligently to support her family, as female moneylenders often claimed. Unlike *giang hồ* lenders, they are sensitive to people's living situation and too weak physically to use violence. This gender essentialism allows them to appear as moral subjects who lend money for a good cause in a burgeoning market economy where certain types of capitalist activity may raise suspicion. Embracing this gender role limits the scope of their operation and confines it to highly localised social spheres, but it also protects them from criticism and repression.

Overall, men and women occupy different positions and embrace different gender roles in the moneylending market in Vietnam. Taking this into account will enrich our understanding of how credit markets work in general and in Vietnam.

Nicolas Lainez is a Visiting Fellow in the Regional Economic Studies Programme at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.



Above: Vietnamese currency. Image Peter Garnhum on Flickr, Creative Commons license.

## Milo Dinosaur: the life and times of a Southeast Asian national beverage

Geoffrey K. Pakiam

Long before COVID-19's spread, Southeast Asia was already struck by the strange ailment known as food heritage fever. Tensions have erupted among citizens in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore over national claims on dishes like chilli crab, *rendang*, and *chendol* over the past decade. Accusations of cultural appropriation have been fuelled by concerns that globally connected urban centres like Singapore are more adept than their neighbours at commodifying food heritage for soft power and tourist dollars.

Less discussed but equally important is the relationship between consumer brands and Southeast Asia's food heritage. It is now commonplace to see 'home-cooked' 'Asian' foods being marketed under established brand names overseas, whether in the form of pre-made spice mixes or restaurant chain offerings steeped in nostalgia. But what about Asian food cultures based on established Western mass consumer brands? How does Western mass manufactured food become Asian national heritage? We can explore these questions in the Southeast Asian context through the curious case of Milo Dinosaur – a concoction whose identity rests on a brand belonging to Nestlé, the world's largest food company.

Milo Dinosaur is a chilled beverage commonly found in casual eateries across Singapore and Malaysia. Vendors blend Swiss multinational Nestlé's chocolate-malt Milo powder with sugar, water, milk and ice, before adding more Milo powder on top. Some recipes even include rainbow sprinkles (fig.1).

Milo Dinosaur's name appears to have originated in Singapore-based Indian-Muslim eateries during the mid-1990s. Eateries claiming credit include A&A Muslim Restaurant, Al-Ameen Eating House, and Al-Azhar Eating Restaurant, all popular with youth and young adults. Many of these open-air outlets were already serving sweetened milk-based beverages like *teh tarik*, ice Milo and *bandung*, as staples. Labelling a turbo-charged version of ice Milo as Milo Dinosaur may have been a way to riff on Singapore's cinema culture, which during the 1990s was saturated with the exploits of giant reptiles in *Jurassic Park* and its sequels.

A second origin story looks towards Malaysia. Singaporeans themselves remember a similarly cloying drink called Milo Shake being served at Malaysian roadside stalls by the mid-1990s. Today, many in Malaysia continue to insist that Milo Dinosaur is a Malaysian creation.

A third line of enquiry focuses on Nestlé's shifting global presence since the colonial era. The essential ingredient in Milo Dinosaur/Milo Shake – Milo powder – was developed by Nestlé chemist Thomas Mayne in Australia during the early 1930s. Milo was initially manufactured in Australia and marketed in British Malaya as a fortified tonic food for aspirational households and professionals. Following independence, Nestlé began manufacturing Milo in both Malaysia and Singapore, persuading consumers on both sides of the causeway to picture Milo as their respective national drink. Present-day Malaysia is believed to have the world's highest per capita consumption of Milo, with Singapore running a close second. In this telling, Milo Dinosaur was ultimately a child of Singapore and Malaysia's joint colonial legacy and openness to Swiss capital.

A fourth narrative enhances Milo Dinosaur's regional popularity from below. Commercial eateries may have gifted Milo Dinosaur its catchy title, but families in Singapore, Malaysia and Australia were preparing versions of the drink at home in all but name beforehand, sometimes unintentionally. Part of Milo's historic charm lies in the powder's unusually coarse and crunchy grain, giving it an



Above: A Milo Dinosaur. Image taken from The Prata Shop website: <http://www.enaqprata.com.sg/milo-dinosaur>.

attractive mouthfeel when consumed 'raw'. Even in the hands of children, Milo was a relatively easy beverage to prepare. One interviewee remembers having enjoyed cold Milo with extra powder on top while growing up in Singapore during the 1980s. As a child he was introduced to the concoction when visiting his neighbours who happened to be Australian immigrants. His parents also allowed him to make his own Milo at home, resulting in occasional happy accidents when the powder was unable to fully dissolve in refrigerated milk.<sup>1</sup>

Part of Milo Dinosaur's initial allure thus stemmed from past culinary practice, recalling previous generations of children who furtively gobbled Milo straight from the tin like candy, or sprinkled it on bread as a sugar substitute. Whether at home or outside in each other's company, later generations found in Milo Dinosaur an ideal concoction for recreation. As one Singapore vendor observed, "[the Milo powder] falls all over the ice and they can lick it, roll it over their tongues and enjoy its texture".<sup>2</sup> We are essentially witnessing the emergence of a super-sized mocktail, occupying the grey space between childhood and the adult world.

Spontaneous play nonetheless co-exists with Nestlé's guiding hand, though it is difficult to gauge the extent of the multinational's influence from public records alone. Nonetheless, in 2009, Nestlé Singapore's managing director openly stated that Milo Dinosaur's earlier development in Singapore coffee shops was partly due to input from a Nestlé sales team. Nestlé has in fact long promoted alternative Milo consumption practices

in Singapore and Malaysian households. Since the late 1950s, Nestlé's Malayan advertisements have occasionally urged consumers to sprinkle Milo powder over bread. Nestlé even advertised a recipe for 'Milo Milk Shake' in 1940 bearing similarities to today's Milo Dinosaur.

Many Southeast Asians appear sanguine that their taste preferences have been remade by a Swiss multinational over several generations. In both Singapore and Malaysia, Milo Dinosaur has been embraced as a socially unifying food item. The beverage's most high-profile episode in Singapore to date came when Joseph Schooling, Singapore's first-ever Olympic gold medallist, drank his childhood beverage at his favourite hawker stall during his victory parade in 2016. Before Schooling's performance, musicians in Singapore were already enrolling the beverage in songs channelling coffee shop cultures and nationalism. A Kuala Lumpur-based rock band went even further, naming itself Milo Dinosaur.

Milo Dinosaur's popularity can ultimately be traced back to Milo itself. Promoted in Malaya since the 1930s as a hygienic, nourishing, yet relatively affordable beverage, Milo insinuated itself into breakfast and night-time routines for time-scarce families. Cups of chilled Milo from roving Milo Vans remain a fond childhood memory for many. With each successive generation, Milo-drinking increasingly brought people together through space and time.

Milo's image, however, is increasingly marred by biological and health concerns. Roughly one-eighth of Milo consists of lactose, limiting its consumption by lactose-intolerant individuals. In Singapore, Malaysia, Australia

and beyond, public concerns about rising levels of diabetes and obesity have helped stigmatize Milo and other sugary drinks. It is perhaps for these reasons that Milo Dinosaur's main clientele have been Asian youth, who sometimes still produce the enzyme needed to digest lactose in large amounts, and are probably less restrained in their consumption of sweetened beverages than grownups. Rather than dwell on its unhealthy physical effects, fans of Milo Dinosaur can take comfort from its more palliative qualities. Eating and drinking remain unrivalled ways to socialize, celebrate, reminisce, and escape the drudgery of everyday life, not least during these coronavirus-laden times.

Geoffrey K. Pakiam is a Fellow in the Regional Economic Studies Programme at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

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### Notes

- 1 Interview with Kung Chien Wen, 29 August 2019.
- 2 Dawn Lim. 'Reviving Milo and the Beatles'. *The Straits Times*, 1 May 2006.

# Cultural encounters through translation in Northeast Asia

Ilhong Ko

Translation is not merely a form of intercultural communication, it is a cultural encounter between two different worlds. The process of translation opens up an arena in which conceptual boundaries are expanded, meanings are contested, and power conflicts emerge. In this issue of *News from Northeast Asia* we examine how the act of translation can also shed light on the nature of the relationship between the countries in which the original and translated texts were produced.

The way in which translation can lead to bilateral exchange is illustrated by Kyusik Jeong of Wonkwang University in 'Asian workers' solidarity and cultural exchange'. Translation can also act to provide a common ground for engagement, as Nihei Michiaki, Professor Emeritus of Tohoku University, reminds us in 'The translation and cultural exchange of the Japanese classic *Genjimonogatari*'. Translation may

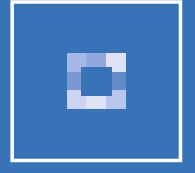
also be accompanied by active attempts to reconfigure power relations and bring about change to the status quo; this is demonstrated by Kyushu University's Tanaka Mika in 'Aspects of Japanese publication translations in *Sinmunkwan's* magazines'. However, translation may also contribute, perhaps unintentionally, to the reproduction of long-standing prejudices, as can be seen in the case of the Japanese translation of the works

of a Korean dissident presented by Kyung Hee University's Moon-seok Jang in 'Across the Korea Strait and the Yellow Sea. Kim Ji Ha in the 1970s'.

Ilhong Ko, HK Research Professor,  
Seoul National University Asia Center;  
Regional Editor of *News from Northeast Asia* [mahari95@snu.ac.kr](mailto:mahari95@snu.ac.kr)

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.

## Asian workers' solidarity and cultural exchange

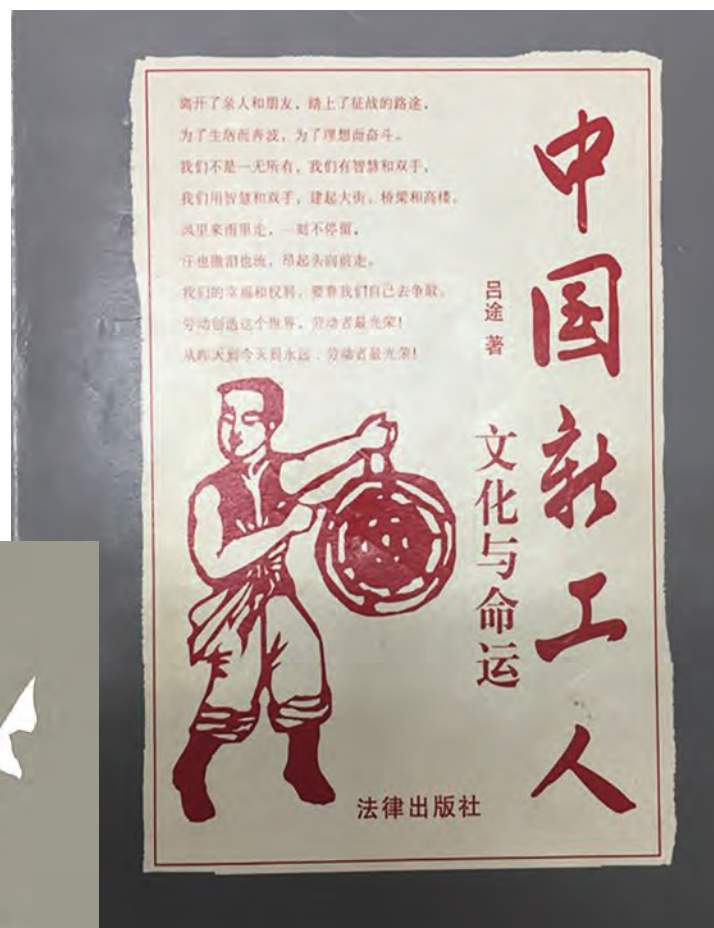
Kyusik Jeong

As Hong Kong's Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement in 2019 gained the world's attention, reports that the citizens of Hong Kong had sung 'March for the Beloved', South Korea's representative grassroots activist song, led some to ponder upon the influence of Korea's democracy movement on these demonstrations. Yet cultural exchange and practice should not be regarded as one-way phenomena; they are lifestyles constructed and modified according to their needs by various organizations and activists over a long time of solidarity and cross-reference.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, 'March for the Beloved', recognized since the 1980s as a key cultural text symbolizing Korea's democracy movement, had already become Asia's 'The Internationale', transcending time and space to be sung throughout Asia, in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Cambodia, and Malaysia.

In China, the socialist state that has turned into 'the world's factory', the active movements of the New Workers group are said to have referenced the culture and experience of South Korea's labor activism. A prime example of this can be found in the Beijing Migrant Workers' Home located in Picun, a village outside Beijing where a high concentration of workers reside. This organization, which began in 2002, aims to build a commune that seeks "the construction of New Workers group culture, various educational activities, and the possibilities of community economy and solidarity". Members have been developing an alternative cultural movement based on the realistic lives and needs of workers, under the following recognition: "Without our culture, our history is lost, and without our history, our future is lost". This organization is headed by Sun Heng, also the leader of the New Workers Art Troupe, who first heard 'March for the Beloved' in 2005 and was so impressed that he adapted it into 'Song of Praise for Workers (劳动者赞歌)', which addresses the lives and struggles of Chinese workers. The song gained popularity during the 'New Workers Culture and Arts Festival' celebrating the new year in 2012 and subsequently became the most popular

song among Chinese labor activism organizations and activists.

Another legacy of Korean political and labor activism that spread throughout Asia is the *Biography of Chun Tae-il* (written by Cho Youngrae in 1983). Recording the life and struggle of Chun Tae-il, an icon and martyr of the Korean labor movement who self-immolated in 1970 for the improvement of the poor working conditions, crying "Workers are not machines" and "Abide by the Labor Standards Act", this book was translated into English in 2003 as *A Single Spark*. It has since come to be read in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and Mongolia. It became a must-read text for Chinese labor organizations and activists following the publication in 2012 of the Chinese translation by Liu Jianzhou, *A Single Spark: Biography of Chun Tae-il* [星星之火: 全泰壹评传].



Above: *The New Workers of China: Culture and Destiny*, written by Lü Tu and published by Legal Publishing House in 2015, presents an analysis of the social structure that the 'New Workers' of China face, as well as a vivid account of their life stories. It was translated into Korean as *The Future of Chinese New Workers* (left) and published in 2018 by Nareum Books. Images provided by the author who participated in the volume's Korean translation.

Lü Tu, an expert in developmental sociology who studied at Wageningen University in the Netherlands, was once a university professor in China, and now lives with workers at the Beijing Migrant Workers' Home carrying out research, education and community activities, confesses that she felt an indescribable range of emotions after reading the biography. As she says, in the lives and struggles of Chinese New Workers, it is possible to observe that the 'Spirit of Chun Tae-il' lives on, beyond borders and language barriers, in the hearts of people who respect the value of life.

It should be noted that the experience and culture of Korean labor activism has not stopped at merely being accepted in China but, through the Chinese New Workers, has evolved and become disseminated within Korea. All three books of Lü Tu on the Chinese New Workers have been translated into

Korean. Among those, *The Formation of Chinese New Workers* and *The Future of Chinese New Workers*, for which the author of this piece served as the main translator, calls for the establishment of subjectivity in the New Workers as both individuals and groups through the analysis of the social structure that those workers are situated in, as well as their 'life stories'. Moreover, *We Are Justified* (the Korean translation published in 2020) presents a detailed examination of the lives, work, and struggles of Chinese female workers. The fact that this book was published as part of the 'Joint Publication Project Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of Chun Tae-il's Death', which was planned by the Chun Tae-il Foundation and eleven Korean publishing companies for the continuation of Chun Tae-il's spirit in the present age, is significant indeed.

In this sense, translation does not stop at the transferring of print from one country to another, but rather is a kind of cultural struggle that calls for the exchange of thoughts and experiences as a mediator of conversations and encounters. Thus the encounter of Chun Tae-il and Chinese New Workers through translation becomes a sign that promotes the solidarity and cultural exchange of Asian workers, transcending industry types, regions, genders, generations, and borders. This would be the true meaning of what Lü Tu said to this author during her visit to Korea in 2015: "Your paying attention to the realities and future of Chinese New Workers is paying attention to the fate of the world's workers, and that is the reason why I am interested in the life and death of Chun Tae-il".

The encounter of Chun Tae-il and the Chinese New Workers continues strong into the present day. In 2020, Sun Heng and Lü Tu came together to compose the song 'Brilliant Spark: In commemoration of Chun Tae-il', a video of which<sup>2</sup> was screened during the closing ceremony of East Asia People Theater Festival, held in 2020 in Korea to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Chun Tae-il's death.

Kyusik Jeong, HK Research Professor,  
Korean-Chinese Relations Institute,  
Wonkwang University [guesik@daum.net](mailto:guesik@daum.net)

### Notes

- 1 See, for example, Raymond Williams' assertion that culture is "a whole way of life", in: Williams, R. 1958. *Work and Society*, Chatto & Windus.
- 2 <https://tinyurl.com/BrilliantSpark-ChunTai-Il>



## The translation and cultural exchange of the Japanese classic *Genjimonogatari*

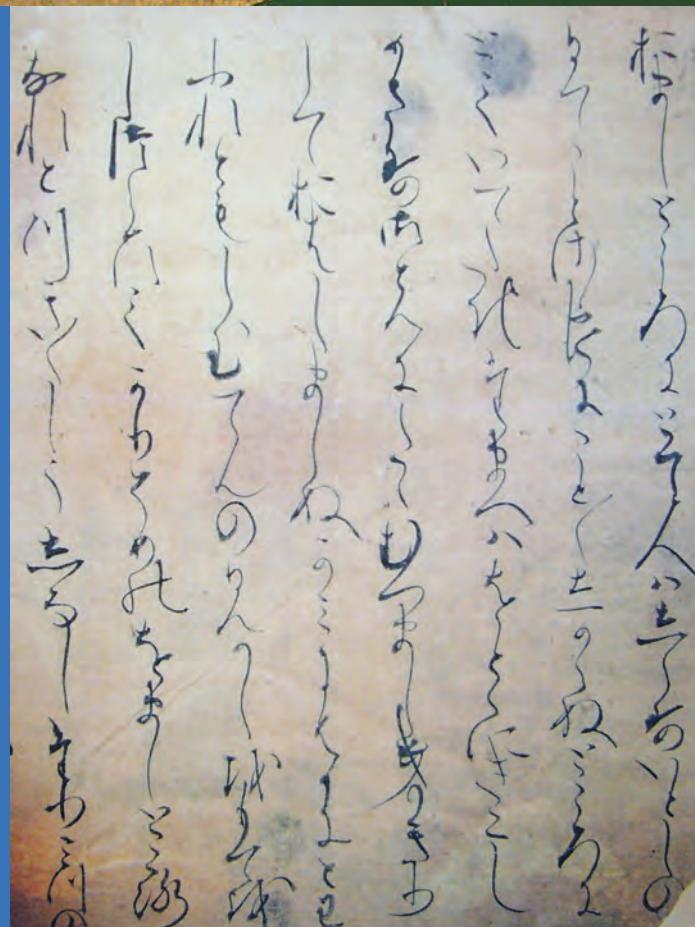
Nihei Michiaki

Translation entails the transmission of a text not only into a different language but also into a different cultural and historical context. As such, no such thing as a 'perfect translation' is possible. Furthermore, when the text to be translated is a piece of foreign literature written in an archaic rather than modern language, it would be needless to say how its translation would be difficult and limited. It could be said that *Genjimonogatari* [The Tale of Genji], a fifty-four volume work written one thousand years ago by the Japanese female author Murasaki Shikibu, has joined the pantheon of 'world literature' not only due to the masterful nature of the work itself but also because so many people from different countries and regions have dedicated themselves to the difficult task of translating this classic. The following overview of the major translations of *Genjimonogatari* published in Northeast Asia including China, Taiwan, and Korea, well illustrates the significance of 'translation' as a form of cultural exchange.

The Chinese and Korean translations of *Genjimonogatari* had initially been based on modern Japanese translations, rather than the original 11th century text. *Genjimonogatari* was written using the language and rhetoric of the Heian period and therefore the interpretation of many passages remains a contested issue among Japanese scholars. As such, it is not surprising that the earliest translations, which had taken place before the scholarship of Japanese classics had been well established in China and Korea, had relied on modern Japanese translations published in Japan.

In China, the translation of the first volume of *Genjimonogatari*, 'Kiritsubo', was published in a magazine as early as 1957, by Qian Daosun who, during his adolescence in Japan, had been educated in Japanese classic literature. Some say that this translation was based on the original text, but it seems more likely that annotations featured in the modern translations of the text had been referenced. The Chinese artist and cartoonist Feng Zikai, who had studied briefly in Japan, began to translate all volumes of *Genjimonogatari* over five and a half years, starting in 1961. His translation was published in three volumes between 1980-1983, after the Cultural Revolution and his subsequent death. This first full Chinese translation of *Genjimonogatari* was based on the modern translations of Yosano Akiko and Tanizaki Junichiro, as well as other Japanese researchers, but remains greatly influential since it is easy to read and continues to be published by several companies. Most of the Chinese publications of *Genjimonogatari* in China have directly utilized Feng's translation.

In Taiwan, an outstanding Chinese translation of *Genjimonogatari* based on the original text was undertaken by Lin Wenyue, a scholar of Chinese-Japanese comparative literature and Chinese literature. The translation was first serially published in a magazine from 1973 to 1978; the full translation first published in five volumes and then the revised edition in two volumes. Lin Wenyue's education until early adulthood had taken place in Shanghai's Japanese concession, and she later engaged in research at Kyoto University. Lin was knowledgeable of the numerous annotations of the original text, the modern translations of Yosano Akiko and Tanizaki Junichiro, and the English translations of Europe and America. However, her translation of the original text was based on her own interpretations and the style is in keeping with the refined atmosphere



Above: Scenes from the *Tale of Genji* painted by Tosa Mitsuyoshi, of the Tosa school in Osaka. Dating from the second half of the 16th century (Azuchi-Momoyama period).

Left: A 13th century fragment of *Genjimonogatari*. From collection of Nihei Michiaki.

Right and below: A selection of covers of the translated books.



of the original text. Lin's translation was highly regarded, even in China, and came to be published in simplified Chinese. Due to this achievement, Lin Wenyue was awarded the Japan Research Achievement Award in 2013 as the only Asian awardee.

The Chinese and Taiwanese translators were aided by the fact that *Genjimonogatari* had been influenced by Chinese literature and historical texts; translating into Korean, however, was inevitably more difficult. In addition to a general understanding of *Genjimonogatari*, an understanding of the background, institutions, and history that gave rise to the work, as well as an in-depth knowledge of the language and culture of the Heian period are required for Korean translators.

Unfortunately, such knowledge and understanding was lacking in the earliest Korean translations of the original text, carried out by Yoo Jeong in 1973 and Jeon Yongshin in 1999. Fortunately, the 21st century has witnessed the publication of Korean translations based on the original text that have been written by researchers of *Genjimonogatari*. In 2008, a high-quality abridged translation of all volumes of *Genjimonogatari* was published by Kim Jongduck, the leading researcher in South Korea on this classic. Lee Misuk, who has published a research monograph on *Genjimonogatari* in Japan, also began to translate the work in 2014. Her translation is based on an interpretation of the original text and various commentaries and two of

six volumes have been published by SNU Press to present. The complete Korean translation of *Genjimonogatari* by a researcher of the work will hopefully be accomplished in the near future.

It would be wrong, however, to expect the above mentioned 'outstanding translations' to be 'perfect translations'. A 'perfect translation' simply cannot exist. As an act of transferring a text into another language based in a different culture and with a different history can inevitably only exist as a fusion of cultures. In its original form, 'translation' is above all cultural exchange.

Nihei Michiaki, Professor Emeritus,  
Tohoku University [mnihei@hotmail.com](mailto:mnihei@hotmail.com)

## Aspects of Japanese publication translations in Sinmunkwan's magazines

Tanaka Mika

**S**inmunkwan (新文館) was a publishing company established in Seoul in 1908 by Choe Nam-seon (1890-1957), one of the key intellectuals of modern Korea. It gained prominence as the publishing house of *Sonyeon* (少年) (November 1908 – May 1911), considered to be Korea's first modern magazine, and *Cheongchun* (青春) (October 1914 – September 1918), a comprehensive cultural magazine that was popular in the 1910s. Featured in these two Korean magazines were numerous translations of Japanese publications. An analysis of these translations sheds light on the nature of Sinmunkwan's relationship at the time with the Japanese publishing sector.

In *Sonyeon*, many of the Korean translations of western works were based upon the Japanese translations of the original texts. Key characteristics of the Korean translations featured in *Sonyeon* are the addition of explanatory comments and the tailoring of expressions for the Korean audience. For example, Choe Nam-seon added explanations about historical figures (such as the Macedonian King Alexander, the philosopher Francis Bacon), as well as on western concepts such as 'materialism' and 'the Reverend'. In addition, he paraphrased 'exemplary man' into *yangban* (a term referring to the traditional ruling class or gentry of Korea during the Joseon Dynasty) so that the translation may be understood within the Korean cultural context.



Fig 1: Images from *Chugaku Sekai* (中學世界) Issue 13-1 (published in January 1910) (left) and *Cheongchun* (青春) Issue 1 (published in October 1914) (right). In this case (and other similar cases), the article itself was not translated but the illustrations or layouts of Japanese texts regarding world topics or events were referenced. Images of the original articles scanned by the author.

Another characteristic feature of the translations in *Sonyeon* is the revision of the text so that 'boys' – the magazine's readership (*sonyeon* means 'boy' in Korean) – are addressed directly and the expectations for these 'boys' are clearly expressed. One example would be the addition of the following sentence at the end of the article 'The Youth of Edison, the King of Electricity' [電氣王エディソンの少年時節] to express an expectation for these 'boys': "We wish to know what kinds of trees and eggs of invention are being fostered and hatched in the future in Korea" [新大韓에는 어떠한 發明의 나무가 자라가고 알이 깨여가는가를 알고자하오].

In the case of *Cheongchun*, a magazine in which pieces on 'global knowledge' featured prominently, the material for many of the pieces was obtained by translating numerous Japanese publications, such as *Taiyo* (太陽) and *Chugaku Sekai* (中學世界), published by Hakubunkan (博文館), or *Gakusei* (學生), published by Fuzanbo (富山房). An analysis of the translations that appear in these magazines reveals that attempts were made to situate Korea within the global context substituting 'Korea' for 'Japan'. For example, 'Ueno Zoo in Tokyo' was replaced by 'Changdeokgung Zoo', 'Tokyo' by 'Gyeongseong' and 'Kyoto' by 'Pyeongyang'.

The paraphrasing of expressions to align with Korean culture or the presentation of Korea as the 'subject' through the replacement of terms can also be observed in the children's magazines published by Sinmunkwan in the period between the final publication of *Sonyeon* and the first issue of *Cheongchun*, such as *Bulgun Jeogori* (붉은저고리), *Aideulboi* (아이들보이) and *Saebyeol* (새별). For instance, 太郎さん (*Taro-san*) from the original text is translated as 'friend' and 大名 (*daimyo*) as *yangban*.

Sinmunkwan's magazines for children are also notable for the fact that they were printed mostly in Hangul, the likely reason for this being the preservation of the Korean language at the time of Japanese colonial occupation. Purely Korean expressions were used as much as possible, with great effort being made to avoid the use of Chinese characters. Examples of this include the way in which *naruneun teul* (나르는 틀), an expression meaning 'a flying machine' that uses only Hangul characters, was used instead of *bihanggi* (飛行機), the more generally used term to translate 'airplane', but which is comprised of Chinese characters. Another such case is the use of *jeollo ganeun soore* (절로가는수레), meaning 'wagon that goes on its own' instead of *jadongcha* (自動車) for 'automobile'. Indeed, Choe Nam-seon urges the readers of *Aideulboi* to "make sure to write in Korean" for correspondence. The creation of Korean expressions in the process of translation went hand in hand with his attempts to preserve a pure version of the Korean language that did not depend on Chinese characters.

As the above example of Choe Nam-seon's translation of various Japanese publications and the publication of these translations in the magazines produced by his publication house, Sinmunkwan, illustrates, 'translation' was not merely the act of transferring a text from one language to another, but also involved active attempts to enlighten the people or to preserve culture.

Tanaka Mika, Ph.D. Candidate, Kyushu University [mikatanaka35@gmail.com](mailto:mikatanaka35@gmail.com)

## Across the Korea Strait and the Yellow Sea. Kim Ji Ha in the 1970s

Moon-seok Jang

**K**im Ji Ha was a poet who resisted Park Chung Hee's regime of developmental dictatorship in 1970s Korea. In 1970, he published a poem that criticized the military dictatorship, and the Korean government imprisoned him under the outrageous claim that he had violated the Anticommunist Law. After being released, Kim Ji Ha published another poem that sang of democracy, and soon returned to prison. His life in the 1970s was a cycle of imprisonment, release, escape, and arrest, and he was not able to publish his work in Korea until 1982.

Among the people who reached out to him in solidarity during his imprisonment were Japanese citizens. In the 1970s, around twenty collections of the works of Kim Ji Ha, a resistance poet of Korea, Japan's former colony, were published by the people of Japan, the former colonial empire. Twenty is the number of official publications produced in the 1970s in Japan; this number skyrockets when pamphlets, newsletters, and pirate publications are included. The publication of Kim Ji Ha's works in 1970s Japan was a movement of solidarity between Korea and Japan led by Japanese citizens as a campaign to support Kim Ji Ha. Japanese citizens, religious figures, literary figures, and Koreans in Japan participated in this movement. The Japanese citizens observed the process of Kim Ji Ha's trials in real time while editing and publishing the various manifestos that he drafted, along with the records of his trials. As the oppression of Kim Ji Ha intensified in Korea, the power of solidarity shown by Japanese citizens also strengthened.

When Kim Ji Ha was sentenced to death in 1974, Japanese and Korean-Japanese literati staged a hunger strike, and approximately a thousand Japanese citizens protested in front of the Korean Embassy in Japan. Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Howard Zinn, Edwin Reischauer and others participated in the International Committee to Support Kim Ji Ha, following the suggestion of Oda Makoto and Tsurumi Shunsuke. In June of 1975, Kim Ji Ha was awarded the Lotus Prize for Literature from the Afro-Asian Writers' Association as a writer of a 'free-world' country; this was also due to the help of the Japanese literati. As a result of the solidarity and attention of Japanese citizens, the complete collection of Kim Ji Ha's works was published in Korean and Japanese in 1975 and 1976, respectively. Given that the publication of Kim Ji Ha's works had been prohibited in Korea, their publication in Japan as a result of the solidarity of Japanese citizens became a huge international incident.

Some unexpected problems arose, however, in the process. As Kim Ji Ha – the 'resistance poet' of the former colony – was being helped by the citizens of the former colonial empire, Japan, for over ten years, a 'relationship of aid' became fossilized. While the stereotypes of Korea as an underdeveloped country of dictatorship, and Japan as a country helping the oppressed resistance poet, came to be reproduced, Kim Ji Ha's literary themes of criticizing colonialism were no longer given due attention. Despite the fact that so many of Kim Ji Ha's works had been published in Japan, it was only the sentiment that 'Kim Ji Ha must be helped' which flourished. The self-reflexive question 'Why should I read Kim Ji Ha now?' was omitted.



The Chinese magazine *World Literature* also introduced a translation of Kim Ji Ha's works in June 1979, in this case in association with the novel *El Señor Presidente* by Miguel Ángel Asturias, a Guatemalan writer. Both Kim Ji Ha and Asturias' works shared the themes of dictatorship and resistance, allowing the reader to read the two together in order to grasp the universality and specificity of dictatorship in underdeveloped countries from a new perspective. This Chinese publication of Kim Ji Ha's works illustrates the fact that reading East Asian literature alongside Central American literature can open up the possibility of imagining world literature in a new way. Yet, it should be noted that the Chinese translation utilized not only Kim Ji Ha's original Korean works but also the versions that had been published in Japan. This shows how Japanese, the language of the former colonial empire, continued to play the role as a mediator in the process of East Asian communication, even in the Cold War era.

Kim Ji Ha in the 1970s remained immobile in South Korea due to imprisonment and dictatorship oppression. However, translated into Japanese and Chinese, his works were able to travel. The crossings of borders demonstrated by Kim Ji Ha's works leaves us to ponder upon the task of solidarity of East Asian citizens and the conditions for such solidarity; it also opens the door to imagining world literature in a new way and the possibilities of this endeavor.

Moon-seok Jang, Assistant Professor, Department of Korean Language and Literature, Kyung Hee University [imhwa@chol.com](mailto:imhwa@chol.com)

Above: *Collected Works of Kim Ji Ha (Vol. 1)*, published in Japan in 1976. The cover illustration is the work of the Japanese artist Tomiyama Taeko. Image of the original cover scanned by the author.  
Below: Japanese citizens demonstrating in front of the Korean Embassy in Tokyo in July of 1974. Image from *Sanzenri* Feb. 1975, scanned by the author.

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# Stretching community, bridging distance

## Migration and belonging in Mustang and New York

Benjamin Linder

In recent decades, ethnographies of transnationalism and globalization have become prominent across the social sciences. Within anthropology, this turn helped redress the longstanding hyper-localism of ethnographic research, one that tended to treat categories like 'culture' and 'place' as static and bounded. *The Ends of Kinship* builds on this turn, yet in a way that beautifully retains the nuance and texture reminiscent of an earlier generation of ethnographic writing. The book charts the changing lives of people in (and from) Mustang, a remote district in northern Nepal with close ties to Tibet. Sienna Craig began traveling to Mustang over 25 years ago. Since then, the region has undergone dramatic demographic, ecological, economic, and political shifts. Increased migration – to other sites in Nepal, but also to sites abroad – is both a driver and consequence of such transformations. Aspirational out-migration has yielded rapid depopulation in Mustang, while also driving many to settle in New York City. In the wake of such dispersal, new tensions emerge, but so do new modes of connection.

One of the book's triumphs is its insistence on considering these far-flung sites together, its recognition that understanding contemporary Mustang requires attention to the multi-scalar circulations within which it is embedded. In short, the book understands that these circulations constitute a singular process, and that the process is deeply conflicted. Such migrations promise opportunity and threaten 'traditional' lives. They strain cultural connections and offer new tools for their reinvigoration. *The Ends of Kinship* takes up these issues with enviable prose and remarkable depth. It explores how people from Mustang, whether in Nepal or New York, "care for one another, steward a homeland across time and space, remake households elsewhere, and confront distinct forms of happiness and suffering through this process" (p.10). The central question of the book is how a new reality, characterized by distance, reshapes a community's sense of belonging, obligation, and cultural continuity.

Craig offers two key concepts to illuminate these dynamics: the titular 'ends of kinship' and the 'khora of migration'. The first concept highlights the ambivalence faced by people from Mustang as they navigate new cultural waters, trying to maintain community and kinship ties throughout the radical dispersal of the last 20–30 years. The phrase itself is highly redolent. The term 'ends', in particular, resonates with diverse shades of meaning: the objectives of kinship, the demise of kinship, the completion of kinship, the locations of kinship, the boundary points between which kinship spans. The second concept derives from two separate words in Tibetan: (1) *kora*, the social and spiritual practice of walking clockwise around a sacred space; and (2) *khorwa*, the cyclical nature of existence, commonly known by the Sanskrit term *samsara*. By fusing these two concepts, the 'khora of migration' braids together the mundane and metaphysical, the quotidian and the grand. As applied to migration specifically, it "illustrates patterns of mobility, processes of world-making, and the dialectical relationship between loss and wonder around which diasporic experiences turn" (p.8).

### Writing Himalayan lifeworlds

The book's structure echoes the cyclical existence it describes. Its 6 sections masterfully guide readers through different stages of life in Mustang and beyond: pregnancy and birth (Part I), childrearing and education (Part II),



Top: Tsarang palace from monastery © Sienna Craig.  
Above: New York street scene. Photo by Emily Xie on Unsplash.

livelihood and subsistence (Part III), marriage and gender (Part IV), ecology and place (Part V), and finally death and loss (Part VI). Each of these sections includes one fictional short story and one ethnographic chapter. Those familiar with Craig's career will know that she has published widely beyond academic formats. In addition to her scholarship, she has also written a children's book, poetry, the text for a book of artistic photography, and more. In *The Ends of Kinship*, the line between the creative short stories and the ethnography is always clear, but the nuance, texture, and quality of Craig's prose shines in both genres. The book is neither a staid academic ethnography nor a self-indulgent literary foray. Craig's writing is empathetic and poignant, bringing to life the community and characters she describes, whether they are actual friends or fictional inventions.

We are told of new tensions and strains arising from accelerating out-migration: children who cannot speak the same language as family members, new norms surrounding marriage and childbirth, a loss of connection to ancestral landscapes, the difficulties of making a living in New York, and the different difficulties of making one in Mustang. In Part VI, focused on death, Craig writes of witnessing a village funeral procession:

"I cry. Not because I knew this woman. Not because I understand the subtleties of this funerary rite or the complexities of this grandmother's story. But because the dirges offered up as part of the ritual process for one person resonate with the loss of a way of life—if not the life force of the village itself." (p.210)

As people (especially younger people) increasingly move away, Mustang is faced with new threats to its persistence and cohesion. As a result, the pages about death take on broader significance: the biological death of people, but also the possible death of traditional lifeways. Yet, refreshingly, the book studiously avoids fatalism. Throughout, readers are given examples of cultural maintenance, of new forms of belonging taking shape in and through diasporic circulations. Craig writes of community projects, fundraisers, cultural events, digital chat groups, religious rituals, language classes, and remittances. All of these foster a sense of community across time and space, and all of them highlight the labors of love through which people from Mustang retain (and transform) their community and its traditions. There are spaces of hope and optimism woven throughout the book, perhaps inseparable from the spaces of loss and mourning. Indeed, these are the twin-faced effects of a singular process.

Reviewed title

**The Ends of Kinship: Connecting Himalayan Lives between Nepal and New York**

Sienna R. Craig, 2020.

Seattle: University of Washington Press  
ISBN 9780295747699

### Pushing genres and conventions

There are at least two possible books contained within *The Ends of Kinship*. There might have been, for instance, one book about contemporary Mustang and another book about a South Asian diaspora in New York City. Alternatively, there might have been one book of literary fiction and another book of academic ethnography. Undoubtedly, its author has the knowledge, background, and ability to have pulled it off. However, in foregoing such arbitrary divisions, Craig has produced something more hybrid, exciting, and true-to-life. As she has made clear, understanding the two main field sites requires understanding them together. They are interlaced through circuits of labor and exchange, of kinship and sociality. To consider them independently would miss something crucial about both. Likewise, placing literary short stories alongside ethnographic nonfiction joins a growing body of work challenging academic writing conventions. There is a beautiful literary quality to all of Craig's nonfiction chapters, and a keen ethnographic depth to her creative short stories. In other words, but both genres speak to and strengthen each other throughout.

*The Ends of Kinship* does not delve deeply into contemporary theoretical arguments, and Craig offers only passing glances at extant literatures. She jettisons traditional in-text citations throughout, though she does include a glossary, Essay on Sources and Methods, and full bibliography at the end of the book. On the one hand, some readers may feel disappointed by this. It would have been welcome to see the rich ethnographic content situated more deeply within ongoing scholarly debates. On the other hand, the book's approach has at least two critical benefits. First, Craig's twin conceptual pillars (i.e., the ends of kinship and the *khora* of migration) emerge from the research context itself, meaning that her discussion is less beholden to the terms of a Western intellectual cannon. Second, the lack of in-text citations and theoretical tangents lets the words breathe and reverberate. They are less encumbered by rigid frameworks, less burdened by overlaid concepts. This allows the writing to resonate more freely.

This book will hold the attention of anyone interested in Nepal, migration, or diasporic experiences. It is complex yet accessible, making it suitable for undergraduates as well. Indeed, Craig has set up a website<sup>1</sup> that includes, among other resources, a series of reflective writing prompts tailor-made for classroom use. *The Ends of Kinship* offers an admirable account of life in and beyond contemporary Mustang, of the stretch and strain induced by migration, and of the ties that continue to bind a community together.

Benjamin Linder, International Institute for Asian Studies, The Netherlands

### Notes

1 <https://sites.dartmouth.edu/endsofkinship>, accessed 4 March 2021.

# Life under the palms

Anushka Kahandagamage

This book is the biography of Jacob Haafner, a Dutch traveler of German origin. He spent more than 20 years in South Africa, India, Sri Lanka, and Mauritius. According to the author, unlike the memoirs of many travelers, entrepreneurs, colonial officers, Haafner captured the cruelty and oppression of colonialism in his writings. Haafner's narratives shows the cruel side of the slave trade, the maltreatment of slaves as animals and the abandonment of colonial subjects to death by famine.

The book consists of five chapters, including an introduction. The Introduction maps the expeditions of Haafner and his writings. Further, the author locates himself in the study and within the world of Haafner by elucidating how he became attracted to Haafner's writings. The author of the book, Paul van der Velde, is a historian and an expert on the Dutch in Asia. The book is translated from Dutch to English by Liesbeth Bennink.

The first chapter is marked as 'A Wandering Existence', which includes Haafner's first expedition to the East and his experiences and adventures. As an adolescent, Haafner secures the opportunity to sail to East with his father,

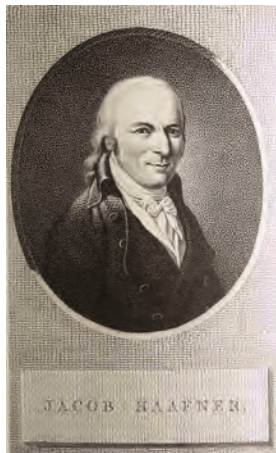
Reviewed title

## Life Under the Palms: The Sublime World of the Anti-colonialist Jacob Haafner

Paul van der Velde. 2020. Translated by Liesbeth Bennink

Singapore: NUS Press  
ISBN 9789813250826

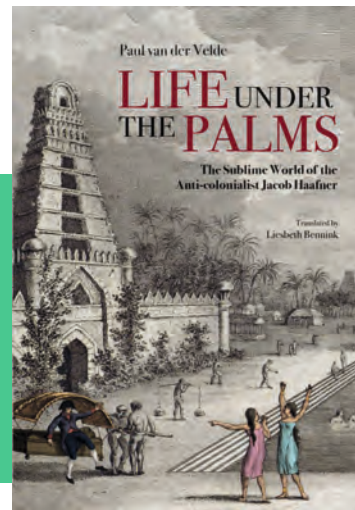
a medical doctor. However, he does not sail solely as the doctor's son but as a ship's boy on the vessel. The second chapter is assigned to explain the troubled life he had in India. This chapter consists of his interactions with different colonial rulers who traveled to the East, and reveals details about famine in India, Haafner's struggles to make money and survive in these difficult times by doing



Jacob Haafner in 1805 by Dr. Thomas Kohl. Image in Public domain on Wikimedia.

different jobs. The third chapter, 'Where can our Soul Shelter', is dedicated to his expedition to Ceylon with his young wife and life in Ceylon. The penultimate chapter is about his return to India, and the closing chapter concerns his final sorrowful years in Europe.

This title introduces the 19th century Dutch traveler, Haafner, and his writings to the world. The book opens a window onto the 19th century colonial world by including excerpts and examples of Haafner's original writings and his sketches. The book provides an approachable point of view on the available sources to a learner interested in studying the colonial past. Further, the author's expertise and in-depth research in the field ensure an authentic account of Haafner's writings. Haafner practiced drawing from a young age and his sketches can be seen in his written accounts. By including these drawings in the book, the author subtly draws the reader



into the past provoking curiosity to research this history further. Haafner glorifies the multi-cultural and multi-religious co-existence in the East by highlighting the stimulating interactions and meetups he had with divergent ethnic, cultural, and racial groups. Although his father was a medical doctor, migrating to the Netherlands from Germany posed the Haafner family with challenging financial conditions. The situation led Haafner and his father to join and work on a Dutch East India Company ship, which sailed to the East. Haafner's father dies on the journey, and Haafner becomes an orphan. Due to these conditions, he ends up in a lowly position in the world of colonial masters. The author unearths the different layers of colonial subjects and the colonial masters through the life story of Haafner, going beyond the simple categories of the colonizer and the colonial subject. Haafner glorifies the mixed cultural milieu in the colonies over highly hierarchical Dutch society. He is able to see and depict the oppressive nature of colonization because he is from a lower layer of the colonial endeavor.

What makes the character of this book special is that it exposes the reader to a lesser known colonial writer with a markedly different perspective. In addition, the book introduces new sources that can provide the historian with a more nuanced and a subtle analysis that goes beyond imposing the present socio-economic and political structures on the past.

This is the English translation of the Sinhala review published on the Patitha website, 4 November 2020.

Anushka Kahandagamage,  
South Asian University, India

# Foodways of Macao

Robert Antony

Having lived in Macao for over 15 years, I thought I knew quite well what Macanese food was all about. That is, until I read Annabel Jackson's new book, *The Making of Macau's Cuisine*. Trained in anthropology and a recognized food critic, the author carefully examines the history, nature, and roles that food has played in Macao and in other Portuguese settlements in Asia. The inclusion of the other Portuguese creolized foodways of Goa and Malacca provides not only useful comparisons but are also important for understanding the close interconnections and similarities between these cuisines.

Although not well known outside eastern Asia and often misconstrued, Macanese food is one of the world's earliest fusion cuisines. When the Portuguese founded Macao nearly 500 years ago, it was a relatively barren stretch of sand dunes and low hills, with only one or two fishing villages and an A-Ma Temple. In building the city the early settlers, who were all males, needed to import nearly everything from outside, including food and women from other Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia. So right from the start, Macao's foodways borrowed from and adapted to the foods, spices, and cooking styles of a large variety of peoples.

Reviewed title

## The Making of Macau's Cuisine: From Family Table to World Stage

Annabel Jackson. 2020.

Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press  
ISBN 9789888528349

In recognition of its unique cuisine in 2017 Macao became a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy and its cuisine has since entered the world stage.

### Fusion cuisine

As Jackson explains, because Macanese food had its origins in the fusion of many diverse cuisines and has continued to evolve over the centuries, it is impossible to pinpoint what exactly constitutes Macanese food. Even within the Macanese community at large, there is little consensus as to what comprises Macanese cuisine. For purists, in fact, it has become a lost art, yet for most ordinary tourists, who want to enjoy a different cuisine, it is simply the food prepared in restaurants in Macao. Indeed, today in most restaurants in Macao, whether categorized as Portuguese or Cantonese, they all include dishes on their menus purporting to be Macanese.

This raises the question of authenticity. What is Macanese cuisine? What locals and tourists nowadays eat at home and in restaurants is a far cry from what the people living in Macao ate several centuries ago. People and their tastes have continually changed over the centuries and so have ingredients, flavors, and cooking styles. As the author rightly explains, the nature of Macanese food is adaptation.

Cuisines are always evolving. From its origins in the Portuguese colonies, Macao's early foodways followed the spice trade from Africa to India to Southeast Asia to Macao and Japan. Take the iconic Macanese dish, African Chicken, which likely was invented only in the 1940s, believed to have been created by chef America Angelo at the former Pousada de Macao. In its earliest forms, it was blackened and spicy with a marinade of butter, garlic, and chilies, but today in most versions it is baked in a tomato and peppery peanut sauce. It is a typical creolized dish that combines flavors from Mozambique, Goa, and Malacca, and each of these places also have their own versions of the same dish with different names. Today Macanese cuisine has progressed from its traditional Portuguese foundations to a creolized mixture of Portuguese and Asian cooking, to what is more recently heavily influenced by Chinese cuisines. For Macao fusion food represents something new and distinct.

### Macanese food and identity

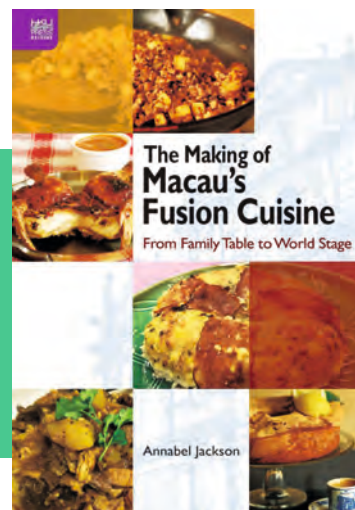
Another topic discussed throughout the book concerns questions of identity. Who are

the Macanese and what role does food play in their identity? Food is an important cultural marker for most groups of people. To be considered a true Macanese, as the author points out, one must have some Portuguese ancestry. Like their cuisine, the Macanese people are an eclectic mixture of different and evolving ethnic groups. At first the Macanese were the offspring of the original male Portuguese settlers and females from their colonies in Mozambique, Goa, and Southeast Asia. Later, in the 20th century, the so-called Neo-Macanese are the progeny of Portuguese or Macanese fathers and Chinese mothers. Thus, in terms of foodways, family recipes included a large mixture of different culinary tastes and techniques yet were nonetheless considered Macanese. As food styles changed over time so too did perceptions of one's identity.

Interestingly, today there are more people who identify themselves as Macanese who live outside Macao than inside the city itself. There is a large Macanese diaspora spread across the globe. As a critical part of her research, Jackson conducted a large number of interviews and surveys of Macanese living in Hong Kong, Europe, North America, and Australia. Because many diasporic Macanese people have a sense of rootlessness, memories of home foods and recipes have become important identifiers of their common culture and values. In creating an identity, in fact, the sharing of recipes and the production of cookbooks have become crucial. As the author explains, today Macanese food has moved away from being everyday food to something more symbolic and ceremonial. How one remembers the aromas and tastes of certain foods is as important as the actual foods themselves. At the same time, with the diaspora Macanese cuisine has diffused around the world in trendy ethnic restaurants. For most Macanese both at home and abroad, food is decisively embedded in their notions of identity.

In conclusion, this is a concise and fascinating book on a little-known and often misunderstood fusion cuisine that should be of interest to anyone wanting to learn about Macao and the dissemination of food culture in general. There is indeed more to Macao than merely casinos and gambling.

Robert Antony,  
Shandong University, China



Above: Portuguese Custard Tarts © Macau Photo Agency on Unsplash. Left: Galinha à africana, African chicken © muloahu on flickr under a CC license.

# Invisibility by design

Sally Tyler

Reviewed title

## Invisibility by Design: Women and Labor in Japan's Digital Economy

Gabriella Lukács. 2020.

Durham, NC: Duke University Press  
ISBN 9781478006480

While reading *Invisibility by Design* for review, I was struck by two news items: 1) *Forbes* Magazine provoked controversy by downgrading its estimate of Kylie Jenner's net worth to a scant USD 900 million, rather than the USD 1 billion previously reported when the magazine named her the world's youngest self-made billionaire, and 2) Lisa Su became the first woman to top the S&P 500 list of highest-paid CEO's.

Whatever the valuation of Jenner's cosmetics line, launched while she was still a teen, it owes much of its stratospheric success to relentless social media promotion. And Su, CEO of Advanced Micro Devices (AMD), achieved her compensation milestone at the helm of a corporation which manufacturers semiconductors for use in the digital gaming industry. Clearly, neither occurrence would have happened if not for the digital economy.

Author Gabriella Lukács would likely characterize both these examples as outliers that do not typify opportunities for women within the digital economy. She uses her fieldwork exploring the experiences of young women in Japan who became digital photographers, net idols, bloggers, online traders and, cell-phone novelists to underscore the fallacy of the digital economy as a more democratic, egalitarian, and inclusive mode of production.

The growth of Japan's digital economy in the 1990s through the first decade of the 21st Century paralleled its labor market deregulation and accompanying cultural shift in which rigidly-defined, lifetime employment opportunities were no longer the norm. At the same time, the role of women in Japanese society was rapidly evolving with greater expectation of their labor market participation, without social policies to support it, such as paid family leave and affordable childcare. As such, the development of the digital economy provides a flashpoint ripe for analysis in the context of cultural anthropology, labor, and gender, all of which Lukács does with varying success.

Some of the examples Lukács uses to illustrate her thesis that platform owners tap women's unpaid labor and make it invisible do not serve it well. The work is weighed down by overreliance on disciplinary jargon that does little to advance her case. She repeatedly asserts that the digital economy offers instances of feminized affective labor, yet occasionally undermines her own argument by allowing that most contemporary work represents both affective and intellectual labor and even allows that some aspects of the digital economy reflect forms of reproductive labor. Jargon aside, the type of labor exemplified within the digital economy is less relevant than the question of whether it is labor in the most general sense, as in did the women who undertook the activity have an expectation of earning a living through it? The fields that Lukács examines demonstrate a mixed bag in support.

The chapter on *onna no ko shashin*, sometimes translated as girly photography, which begins the book, offers a fascinating glimpse into the groundbreaking early digital work of Hiromix, Ninagawa Mika, and Nagashima Yurie. Operating before ubiquitous selfie culture took root, these young women frequently turned their cameras on the details of their everyday lives in a vision that was both artistic and political, declaring in effect that their lives were worth memorializing. While some of the women Lukács interviewed stated a desire to become famous through their photography, none explicitly expressed the goal of using the medium to become wealthy. In fact, she offers salient examples of instances in which they rejected commercial opportunity

in order to stay true to their artistic vision. Some of them continued to work in other jobs part-time, even after achieving critical acclaim. Ultimately, their stories are ambiguous and could be used either as an illustration of the inherent limitations of the digital economy or to show that creative labor may embody goals beyond the financial.

Similarly, the chapters on net idols (digital content creators who sought branding opportunity via personal websites), bloggers and cell phone novelists fail to disaggregate between motivation such as personal satisfaction, social connectivity, and desire for income. In societies where the views of young women are rarely sought or seriously examined, digital platforms can provide a voice and ready-made audience to offer validation. Absent expanded employment and economic opportunity for women in Japan, the desire for 'meaningful work' illustrated by personal fulfillment, often eluded by Lukács's subjects, and the premium placed on work based on compensation and opportunity for advancement will likely remain muddled.

The chapter on online trading offers the best fit with Lukács's broader thesis, in that the women who commenced the labor had clear objectives to make money and were swayed by promotion of the digital realm's capacity as a conduit to wealth through part-time, irregular or amateur work not afforded by the traditional Japanese employment system. It is also the only chapter in which she illustrates in detail the extent to which platform owners derived profits from workers' labor, an assertion she makes throughout the book.

The growth in online trading in the second half of the 21st Century's first decade was synchronous with the Japanese government's goal to implement an economic transition away from traditional saving to investing. Japanese housewives, seen as non-threatening, trusted messengers, would become poster children for this seismic experiment in social engineering. The extent to which the women interviewed sought to minimize their efforts, by claiming that they only spent as much as 15 minutes a day to make USD 3,000 per month but later admitting that they initially spent months of 20-hour days in front of the computer to attain trading proficiency, serves to illustrate Lukács' argument about how the digital economy renders women's labor invisible by promoting the myth of its ease.

As a policy professional, my primary lens is admittedly in the applied context and my most salient critique of the book is that it fails to examine any policy prescriptions that could remedy the inequities Lukács attempts to describe. Was there no discussion with subjects about the extent to which wage parity, affordable child care and equal opportunity for advancement within traditional employment would have rendered the digital economy less attractive to them? Likewise, a rigorous examination of whether the digital economy merely provides a fallback when traditional opportunities stagnate or if a newer generation of workers truly prioritizes the flexibility and degree of autonomy it represents over job security and compensation would have been useful. If the latter were indicated, then an exploration of subjects' reaction to the concept of minimum basic income might be warranted.

*Invisibility by Design* offers many lively examples of the gendered impact of new work opportunities in Japan, but ultimately raises more questions than it answers. As digital platforms including Task Rabbit and Fiver grow exponentially, underscoring a dramatic global shift toward the gig economy, research leading to policies supporting worker equity becomes even more critical if the digital economy is to have any chance to fulfill its promise as the egalitarian and inclusive sphere some envision for it.

Sally Tyler, independent policy analyst,  
United States

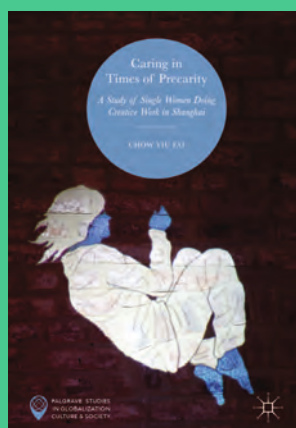
# Caring in times of precarity

Christiane Brosius

Reviewed title

## Caring in Times of Precarity: A Study of Single Women doing Creative Work in Shanghai

Chow Yiu Fai. 2019.

New York: Palgrave Macmillan  
ISBN 9783319768977

and allows us to think about neoliberal politics of creative (self-) employment, poetics of pleasure and the possibilities of unfolding a life of one's own – despite all challenges – in urban habitats. Being single gestures towards concepts of respectability, autonomy and precarity at a particular moment and place in time.

How does a single lifestyle correspond with the highly demanding conditions of creative work in globalizing urban environs? And how does the single woman fit into an Asian realm, particularly under a paradoxical presence of Maoist notions of femininity, Confucian values and globalized and consumer-based repertoires of neo-liberal qualities of womanhood. With his book on single women in the creative industries of Shanghai, Chow Yiu Fai enriches and expands the slender field of 'single studies' and challenges views of precarity that often dominate the debate by proposing an ethics of care. The Associate Professor at the Department of Humanities and Creative Writing of Hong Kong Baptist University considers the perspective of journalists, musicians, artists, designers, and others. Altogether 25 interlocutors from various age, social and economic backgrounds were interviewed in Shanghai between 2015-17. Chow asks as well as ethnographically delineates how they experience precarity as stigmatization, stress and anxiety, but also nurture liberty,

independence and choice. Care is defined as large as self-care (not to be identified with selfishness), for one's well-being, agency and aspirations towards success and recognition, be it among working class or upper middle class. The author considers intergenerational relations of single women, how single women in the media reflect their media-based representation – between glamorization and stigmatization, inequality and empowerment. He also considers the role of the city as a laboratory and catalyst but also a highly competitive and lonely space. The eight chapters and epilogue of *Caring in Times of Precarity* are a fascinating read even for non-China specialists. Chow takes the reader to the various empirical grounds he has defined in the individual chapters. The sensibility for small details, for vernacular utterances, and the ability to relate this to larger questions, marks the book as engaged and engaging. But the book is also a remarkable read for its critical recalibration of certain Western-based theories on womanhood, feminism and precarity that – as a consequence – does not fall into the trap of Asianisms and rejection of theories from the 'West' (e.g., Foucault, Mouffe). This book is certainly a good choice for scholars and students in critical area studies, Asia/Chinese Studies, Gender and Urban Studies, as well as Transcultural and Globalisation Studies.

Christiane Brosius, Heidelberg Centre  
for Transcultural Studies, Germany

's 'being single' or 'going solo' (Kinneret Lahad, *A Table for One: A Critical Reading of Singlehood, Gender and Time*, Manchester University Press, 2017) still a taboo to be subsumed under singlism? One would be surprised given that in everyday worlds across the globe, the 'type' of the single – be it man or woman – has become a fairly common sight and narrative in the past two decades or so. And yet, surprisingly, there is yet not much research published about what could be considered as one of the most interesting

phenomena of global urbanization and social transformation, and even less so in the context of the so-called Global South, and with respect to women. If there is, then much attention is paid to how this 'abnormal' lifestyle can be overcome, still pathologizing the single woman as 'left-over' or 'off the shelf', 'too demanding' and 'selfish', to be normalized into marriage or at least a heteronormative relationship. But like Georg Simmel's figure of the stranger, or Benjamin's *Flaneur*, the single (woman) is a fascinating – and urban – phenomenon that emerges almost hundred years later,



## Rats and sewers in 'modern' and 'civilized' French Hanoi

Hans Schenk

Reviewed title

The Great Hanoi Rat Hunt: Empire, Disease, and Modernity in French Colonial Vietnam

Michael G. Vann and Liz Clarke

Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press  
ISBN 9780190602697

### Structure and composition

The book consists of five parts. The first one, by the historian Michael Vann and the artist Liz Clarke, is a so-called graphic history: a historical treatise in a visual form consisting of cartoons with supporting texts. It centres on the presentation of the bubonic plague epidemic in French colonial Hanoi in 1902–03, and the French attempts – ‘darkly humorous’ attempts as the jacket promises – to fight urban rats. This part of 122 pages forms almost half the book and is its hard core. The following four parts form to a large extent supporting arguments to present history in a visual form. The second part consists of a large number of primary and secondary documents that pertain to different episodes of the French endeavour to govern the Vietnamese and fight the plague. Many of these documents have been translated from the French. Vann wrote subsequently in the third part a useful essay of the various needed contexts in order to understand why the French came at all, what they did in Indo-China, and why things went wrong now and then. This part finalizes with remarks on the character of the bubonic plague epidemic (a pandemic one rather). It originated in the 1850s in South China and reached the Southeast Chinese coast and South Asia by the end of the 19th century and struck Hanoi in 1902. The French became notably nervous as the rats that carried the fleas whose bites would transmit plague germs, settled (also) in the recently built sewers meant to keep the French quarter dry and clean.

Of the two short final parts, one is devoted to the history of the book. Vann gives an account of its origins and its later collaboration with Clarke, on the process of making this book. By accident, the rats came to the fore, as Vann writes about his archival research on the French colonial history in the French city of Aix-en-Provence: “When flipping through the decades-old card catalogue for material on municipal regulations, I came across a card for a dossier on ‘Destruction of Hazardous Animals’. Thinking that it would be amusing, I ordered the file. When it came, I was stunned to discover the contents. There were dozens of dates, signed, and stamped forms informing the colonial administration of the capture and killing of thousands of rats” (p.237). Vann decided subsequently to give attention to this ‘micro-history’ as he called it, within the macro perspectives of the French colonial history. The rat killings were originally written down

in a minor part of Vann’s dissertation, but became subsequently an episode in Hanoi on its own, and now even in the form of cartoons. The final section leads the reader to what the book is actually supposed to be; as Margaret Bodemer writes in her review on the back-cover: “a practical text for world history courses”. This final part ends then in style, with ‘Discussion Questions’ and ‘Essay Topics’, and reads like some sort of examination of the content of the preceding pages.

### Visuals and words

The book is not a history of colonial Hanoi. It deals however in some detail with the contexts leading to the French endeavour to colonize Indo-China and to transform the Vietnamese citadel and market settlement into “a little Paris in the East ... in which the French could feel comfortable”, as the context rectangles in the cartoons tell (p.12).<sup>1</sup> Vann and Clarke show in several pages the villas of the French, their impressive public buildings and infrastructural works, built during the 1880s and 1890s, to arrive at this comfortable feeling. These construction activities served as well to demonstrate the ‘civilizing mission’ that the French undertook in Hanoi. Vann and Clarke use this concept of the civilizing mission as a common thread throughout the texts and pictures of the cartoon chapter. It reached its peak with the desire among the French to have a system of sewers in the French quarter like the Parisians had been given, and which was an ultimate symbol of urban modernity and the mission to civilize.

But, then come the rats in Vann’s and Clarke’s graphic story! A bit sneaky first, a bit down-under at a lower graphic, but more and more and on many pages cliff-hanging in what is presented as an evolving historical thriller. Indeed, in 1902 they were detected in the new sewers of the city, and they were “most plentiful in the French quarter” (p.81). Text and graphics suggest subsequently rats strolling in Hanoi’s fine sewers, where “the pipes offered rats a new ecological niche, free of predators and full of food” (p.77).<sup>2</sup> Matters became worse when in 1902 a first case of bubonic plague was detected – not in the quarters inhabited by the native Vietnamese population, as the French supposed. A French citizen – representing the growing legion of French men and women settling in Hanoi, strolling along its boulevards and sitting on the sidewalk cafes with glasses of wine – says to another (per balloon): “well, what do you expect, the native quarter is filthy”, but receives the reply: “au contraire my friend, the

first death was on Rue Paul Bert ... in the heart of the white quarter!”, followed by a graphic of a near heart-attack of one of them and a laughing Vietnamese ‘boy’ (p.83). Modernity has created a potential health-crisis, comment Vann and Clarke and the colonial administration flung into action, demonstrating: “France’s civilizing mission in action!” (p.87).

A first strategy to fight rats was to ask the French physician Alexandre Yersin to come to Hanoi. A few years before he had co-developed<sup>3</sup> a serum against the fleabites carried by rats, and in 1902 he advocated successfully the mass killing of rats. The authorities offered a bounty for every dead rat, and later on for every rat-tail when the pile of rats waiting to be incinerated became too high,<sup>4</sup> but found subsequently profitable rat-farms around Hanoi. This is presented by the authors as Vann explaining on a blackboard to his students: “the French bounty and the Vietnamese reaction illustrate the economic principle of a ‘perverse incentive’” (p.95). Subsequently, however, when the plague epidemic in Hanoi had faded away in the same year, Yersin’s serum proved to be a preventatively effective anti-toxin protecting those who had been in contact with a plague victim.

### Modernity and rats

The stage for the thriller has been set and visualized: modernization and French civilizing colonial power versus fleas, rats, and the plague. The hero has been announced as well: Yersin, though he was reluctantly and distrustfully received in Hanoi with his message of fleas and an anti-serum. Yet, what actually happened to the French in Hanoi was less dramatic after all. Three Europeans died in the whole of Indo-China during the years 1898 and 1908 during which the plague struck intermittently various parts of the colony. Vann and Clarke do not give figures for Hanoi but admit that it affected primarily the Vietnamese and Chinese quarters, which were by the way not provided with sewers that the rats found so convenient. And, let me look at Bombay where the fierce plague-epidemic of 1896 and subsequent years killed thousands of Indians every week, even though sewers were also a far cry in those parts of the city that were most affected. Indeed, the epidemic in Bombay has often been related to exactly the opposite: the absence of an adequate drainage system.

The whole contradiction that Vann and Clarke create so beautifully by rats

seeking a comfortable urban life and hence threaten urban elites striving for modernity and civilization is then a bit overdone, to say the least. Has it been designed for the purpose of a visually thrilling story, full of rats – as said hanging on cliffs – and turning pages? The book, hence shows the danger of offering a catchy episode in visuals and allow – paraphrasing Marshall McLuhan – the medium to become the message. If one ignores, however, the visual drama, and looks at the overall attempt to present in various ways the French colonial adventure in Hanoi, the book may make students curious and read more.

### Postscript

The Vietnamese were quick in removing the symbols of French colonial rule after their independence. Statues of French heroes were torn down, their street names, etc., replaced by Vietnamese ones; at least more than a hundred. One street name still has French roots. The Institute of Epidemiology ‘Louis Pasteur’ can be found on nr. 1 Pho Yersin (the street named after the medical doctor who put the authorities on the right track to fight the plague). The Vietnamese have not forgotten his contribution to ‘modernity’ amidst all the *folie de grandeur*.

Hans Schenk, Independent researcher,  
The Netherlands

### Notes

- 1 I use the word rectangle to make a distinction between these background texts and balloons, which show spoken words: in a red balloon-frame those from Vietnamese words and in a blue one those from the French.
- 2 It is tempting to compare the happy rats in the sewers with the *flâneurs* along the Paris boulevards and subsequently those among the boulevards and cafes of the colonial district of Hanoi, which appear frequently in the book of Vann and Clarke. Even a reminder of Yves Montand’s famous song: “*j’aime flâner sur les grands boulevards*”, etc., is hard to avoid.
- 3 A competing claim for the identification of an effective serum against plague was developed by the Japanese physician Kitasato Shibasaburo.
- 4 The administrative processing of all these rats and tails triggered actually Vann to explore this episode in the French colonial history (see above).

Shane J. Barter (Soka University of America) has a continued interest in experiential education, combining interactive teaching with student field experience. He has mentored several of his students in reviews for [newbooks.asia](http://newbooks.asia); some of the rich results can be read here.

## China's political system

Jaroslav Zapletal and Shane J. Barter

For political scientists, China is as important as it is elusive. It has developed into one of the world's leading economies, with officials guiding market forces and state enterprises through long-term planning. Politically, China remains a single-party authoritarian state with few signs of democratization, although it is also relatively decentralized, responsive, and adaptable. Chinese politics are ever-changing, with our understanding limited by opaque party hierarchies. In light of these and other challenges, we applaud Sebastian Heilmann and his colleagues at the Mercator Institute for China Studies in Berlin for their new book, *China's Political System*. The authors provide a comprehensive, authoritative account of the contemporary political landscape of the Middle Kingdom.

### An authoritative account

*China's Political System* is notable for its overall clarity, with clear writing and organization, and key terms provided in both Chinese and English. Given that the book is a product of several authors, its tone is remarkably consistent. The book is organized in terms of different areas of political science: political institutions, political leadership, political economy, state-society relations, policy making, and political development. Each chapter contains several specific subsections, ranging from food safety and disaster management (in terms of policy) to autonomous regions and public finance (in terms of institutions). Each discussion

provides rich details, at many points aided by clear tables. Of course, a few topics are not discussed in detail—for instance, the book opts not to look at international relations or political history. However, given the enormity of the topic, there are remarkably few stones left unturned.

Readers will appreciate how the authors parse the formal and informal worlds of Chinese politics. Here, personal connections and party influence often determine political outcomes. The book also discusses several sensitive topics in a diplomatic manner, including social unrest, environmental degradation, and corruption. Throughout the book, the authors discuss several interesting themes, including relations between the central and subnational governments, regional inequality, and shifts between 'normal' and 'crisis' modes of political leadership. Another key theme is the growing power of President Xi Jinping. Unlike his predecessors, whose leadership involved consultation and delegation, Xi has demonstrated a more centralized, personalist approach. In Chapter Seven, Heilmann and his colleagues present a thought-provoking

discussion of the implications that Xi's consolidation of power may have for the sustainability of China's political system, as it may be less able to adapt to changing circumstances.

### Potential critiques

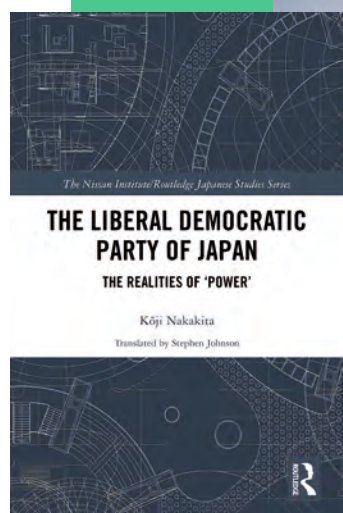
Despite our enthusiasm, we would like to raise some potential critiques. For one, in the book's encyclopedic approach, it sometimes reads like a reference volume. There is limited engagement with major concepts or academic debates surrounding China, as the emphasis is more in painting a thorough, somewhat descriptive portrait. Another potential critique is that, in an effort to provide a neutral, diplomatic account of Chinese politics, the authors may have acquiesced too much. Regarding the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, the authors observe 'a lack of journalistic distance' by the West (p. 97), noting that many Hong Kong residents felt the protestors' criticisms of Beijing to be excessive. Regarding Tibet, the authors note that China justifies its claim 'due to the fact that the region has

been an inseparable part of China since ... the thirteenth century' (p. 284). For some, this tone will be refreshing. For others, however, it may be seen as pro-government.

Our major substantive concern relates to how the authors frame the study of China. On several occasions, the authors emphasize China's distinctiveness. The authors suggest that the "rhythm" of Chinese politics is completely different from that of most other political systems' (p. 396). One potential danger here is that an excessive sense of Chinese exceptionalism may be used to sidestep accountability to international norms. Throughout the book, the authors suggest that Western models are unsuitable for understanding China. We are told that policy making procedures in China are 'markedly different from those in democratic constitutional states' (p. 300), and that Eastern European Communist systems 'do not help to understand developments in the PRC' (p. 298). For one, it is unclear if Western experiences are not useful – for any particular case, we can expect varying levels of applicability. It is also unclear which models might work better. Heilmann labels China as a 'learning authoritarian system' (p. 42); if China learns from international experiences, but not from the West, it would be useful to explain from which countries China is learning. Western cases should not represent our only comparative lenses, as we can also approach Chinese politics in regional context. The authors do so to some extent in terms of political economy, framing China as an Asian developmental state. At several points, the authors note that it seems impossible to have a single-party authoritarian state ruling over an educated society and globalized economy. This is only a puzzle if we focus on Western countries, whereas Asia provides several rich examples. Singapore, which is hardly mentioned in this lengthy study, could serve as a useful comparison. In future editions, the book might wrestle less with how China's politics are novel in Western terms, and instead acknowledge its similarities with its Asian peers.

Such quibbles should not detract too much from what is an authoritative overview of politics in China. Due to its thorough account of the many aspects of Chinese politics, Heilmann and his colleagues effectively moderate the discourse on the topic, dismissing many misconceptions. *China's Political System* promises to stand as a key text for various audiences, including advanced undergraduates, graduate students, policymakers, and even professors who hope to refresh or enrich their knowledge of the People's Republic.

Jaroslav Zapletal and Shane J. Barter,  
Soka University of America



## Explaining political dominance in Japan

Shunji Fueki and Shane J. Barter

Reviewed title  
**The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan:  
The Realities of 'Power'**

Kōji Nakakita, translated  
by Stephen Johnson. 2020.

London: Routledge  
ISBN 9780429053931

For students of Comparative Politics, Japan stands out as a fascinating case. It is one of Asia's few liberal democracies, although one with little turnover in government. Japanese politics have been known for overlapping business ties, powerful internal party factions, limited women's participation, and recently, a rightward turn. At the core of this distinctive political landscape has been the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), whose dominance and ability to recapture power have been extraordinary.

Kōji Nakakita's *The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan: The Realities of 'Power'* provides readers with an authoritative guide to the LDP's inner workings and evolution. Nakakita is a renowned expert of Japanese politics, authoring many books and articles. Already a highly popular book in Japan, the English translation was provided by Stephen Johnson, who is to be commended for such a readable translation of a complex book.

*The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan* features six chapters. Chapter One dives directly into the decline of factional politics in Japan, a product of electoral and finance reforms. Chapter Two looks within the LDP, examining internal party elections and the distribution of offices. In Chapter Three, Nakakita focuses on policymaking, which is increasingly dominated by the executive due



# Familial properties

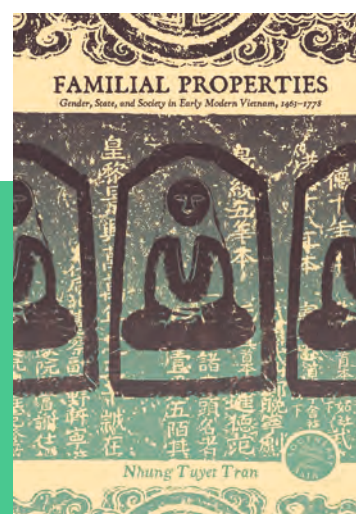
Ha Chau Ngo and Shane J. Barter

Reviewed title

## Familial Properties: Gender, State, and Society in Early Modern Vietnam, 1463–1778

Nhung Tuyet Tran. 2018.

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press  
ISBN 9780824874827



In introductory courses on Southeast Asia, many researchers focus on the relative strength of women as a definitive regional trait compared to neighboring South Asia and East Asia. The focus often lies on Vietnam as a regional crossroads, with a Chinese Confucian order transposed upon a Southeast Asian peasantry. Nhung Tuyet Tran's *Familial Properties: Gender, State, and Society in Early Modern Vietnam, 1463-1778* sheds new light on gender in Southeast Asia. Utilizing a wide range of primary sources, Tran provides an ambitious historical-political anthropological account of gender systems in precolonial Vietnam, citing official laws alongside sites of resistance in a highly readable study.

### Vietnam's gender system

Chapter One lays out what Tran refers to as the gender system of historical Vietnam, a state-articulated vision of proper womanhood from childhood through death (and beyond). Subsequent chapters focus on adolescence, marriage, sexual relations, property, death, and the afterlife, charting the life course of womanhood. Tran interprets Vietnam's gender system in economic terms, with Vietnamese society as a market and its participants as economic actors. The Vietnamese state has promoted its gender system in its quest for stability, as stable families and the continuation of elite agnatic lines were intended to produce a stable social hierarchy as well as a secure tax base. This gender system placed significant pressures on women as responsible actors, making them the key figures in Vietnamese culture and nationalism.

One of the book's great strengths is that Tran lays out official gender systems, but always remembers that lived realities often varied significantly from state visions. Such a feat is difficult in contemporary studies, but is especially impressive in historical work. Each chapter notes different experiences over time, by ethnicity and geography (with the Cham-influenced South featuring distinctive gender systems), and class. Class is especially important, as elite women were expected to conform to stricter rules for the sake of social stability, whereas poor women were afforded more flexibility in areas such as remarriage and the workforce. However, this did not always

benefit lower-class women, who were sometimes expected to fulfill sexual roles for more powerful men. All told, Tran manages to document gender systems across Vietnamese history while paying attention to the diverse experiences of women, successfully painting a general picture while not essentializing.

This nuance is made possible by impressive, meticulous research. Tran bases her discussion on a wide range of sources, including laws, textbooks, early colonial accounts, folk stories, village steles and records, and more, many of which are primary sources written in Vietnamese demotic script. Tran differentiates between prescriptive sources (the laws, textbooks, dictionaries, and guides that lay out what the state thinks should be) and descriptive sources (the legal cases, folk poetry, short stories, missionary letters, and other observations of what was). Particularly impressive is Tran's use of village steles, slabs erected in honor of various patrons. These steles show that Vietnamese women were able to amass resources and maintain influence within a Confucian legal system and veneration in the afterlife.

### Other themes

By examining the application of neo-Confucian laws under the Lê Dynasty and how they affected gender systems in Vietnam, *Familial Properties* informs debates surrounding Southeast Asian versus East Asian influence, state capacity, urban/rural societies, northern versus southern Vietnamese societies, tradition versus modernity, and Vietnamese nationalism. If the question is whether gender in Vietnam was more Southeast Asian, featuring relative autonomy for women, or more Confucian, subordinating women in a patriarchal order, then the answer is that it was both. Vietnam saw both the successful application of Confucian

laws that influenced Vietnamese society, but also resistance to these laws, which often failed to shape local communities. One source of disruption was various civil wars, which necessitated women playing public role. Another was changing markets, with the 'Age of Commerce' creating new areas of female power and wealth. Women were also afforded more autonomy where the state was weakest, namely in rural areas and in the south, and among poorer classes. Tran shows Southeast Asian agency within a Confucian structure, with the Lê state possessing significant, but not total power.

In terms of other topics, Chapter Three discusses legal discourses related to rape, sex work, chastity, and homosexuality. In both, class status mediated crimes and punishments. Homosexuality is notable by its absence in Vietnamese law, with greater attention paid to whether same-sex relations violate class lines or not. Punishments were dealt in cases where poor servants penetrated more powerful partners – where sexual orders overturned socio-economic orders, thus inviting social instability.

The book's final chapter examines the contemporary relevance of historical gender systems in Vietnam. Tran notes that French colonizers framed Vietnamese women as oppressed by Chinese laws to help legitimize colonial power. At independence, Vietnamese leaders promoted similar tropes, noting that Chinese and French forces oppressed women, unlike traditional Vietnamese culture. With one of the great promises of communism was also to uplift women. Today, Vietnamese leaders mix communist and nationalist rhetoric about women's equality, often aimed at denigrating China for political gain. The story told is that ancient traditions of Vietnamese patriarchy were transformed into 'a totalizing, oppressive, misogynist Confucian society' (p. 186), with

the Vietnamese government working to restore Vietnamese traditions. Tran makes a case for greater complexity, challenging the basic trope and locating patriarchy early in Vietnamese history. As Vietnam continues to develop and tensions with China continue to mount, there is a need to question state claims of traditional equality, as if patriarchy lacks roots in Vietnam.

### Possible critiques

*Familial Properties* features impressive research, clear writing, and speaks to a range of important debates. Although Tran succeeds in showing that official laws often played out differently in practice, she could be clearer regarding the limitations of historical records. For the most part, state power correlates with records. Even if we move beyond official records to village steles, it is likely that we are still overlooking the rural majority. The book essentially tackles the hardest cases, showing that even in historical records and areas of state strength, women maintained autonomy and resisted official norms. It should be remembered, though, that where history was not recorded, women likely had even greater autonomy. A related point is that, by focusing on the state, we have little sense of how gender norms were enforced societally. Cases of adultery and perceived sexual indiscretions were more likely to have been punished immediately by non-state actors, with judicial records providing only an echo of social enforcement. Tran provides several accounts of judicial decisions that skirted official rules, cases framed in terms of persuasive women and judicial interpretation. They may also be explained by state weakness, with courts providing post-hoc rationalizations for their inability to act. Even today, many state efforts to enforce gender laws are mediated by strong societal norms, with states forces loathe to admit their weaknesses. State forces such as courts possess incentives to make it appear that social enforcement reflects their will, clouding our understanding of how the reach of state rules.

### Conclusions

All told, *Familial Properties* is an impressive achievement, navigating official and lived gender systems over several centuries of Vietnamese history. Tran manages to paint a broad picture while not losing sight of variation over time, status, and place. It is essential reading for those interested in women's history, Southeast Asian history, gender in Vietnam, and Vietnamese national identity. A rare study that is both meticulous and readable, Tran is to be commended.

Ha Chau Ngo and Shane J. Barter,  
Soka University of America

to the decline of factions and the rise of party leadership. Chapter Four focuses on national electoral battles, including rural support networks, turnout rates, the LDP-Komeito alliance, and party recruitment. Chapter Five examines partner organizations, providing a window into the shifting patterns of the LDP's business and professional networks. Finally, Chapter Six examines subnational politics, including elections and the personal organizations bolstering local candidates.

One of the book's most impressive features is its data. Nakakita mixes quantitative electoral and spending data with personal interviews, internal party documents, and media reports, bringing together multiple sources to illustrate and explain LDP power. The book is replete with instructive figures and tables that illustrate, among other things, politician backgrounds, factional affiliations and strength, industry support for LDP candidates, and more. Specific individuals identified in the book, such as prefectural party bosses and senior LDP officials, provide detailed descriptions of the 'realities' of the LDP.

This book represents a deep dive into Japan's ruling party but will also be of interest to those studying party politics, campaign finance, dominant party systems, and state-society relations. One core theme is the far-reaching effects of electoral

reform. Changing Japan's electoral system in 1994 from the multi-member Single Non-Transferable Vote towards a mixed plurality-proportional electoral system has caused myriad transformations in Japanese politics and within the LDP. Electoral reform largely succeeding in its core aims of weakening factions and pork politics, also transformed the policy process, party membership, leadership styles, business ties, and more. This study is a testament to the importance of electoral systems for shaping political behavior.

Electoral and finance reforms helped bring about the decline of factional politics, paving the way for a more top-down, executive-run LDP. However, Nakakita emphasizes that the LDP's power is relative rather than absolute, with victories resulting from low voter turnout, support from various associations, a weak opposition, and the alliance with Komeito. In fact, the LDP's support base is shrinking. The LDP has adapted to maintain power, but it is hardly unassailable. As the author concludes, 'there is potential for the current political conditions that allow an 'all powerful' LDP to suffer a sudden reversal' (p. 205).

Another key theme is differentiating between the LDP's dominant recent figures, Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe. Although the former mentored the latter, they share a factional background, are third generation politicians, and have dominated the LDP,

they differ by ideology and leadership styles. Nakakita emphasizes how Koizumi promoted neoliberal reforms and courted floating voters with a media-friendly, populist message, while Abe returned to earlier LDP practices and is more conservative. In an effort to reconnect to rural voters alienated by Koizumi's reforms, Abe has captained the LDP's rightward shift, including policies refusing to allow married couples to keep separate surnames, rejecting non-citizen voting rights, and rewriting the constitution to allow for military and emergency powers. One could see this rising conservatism as an unexpected consequence of electoral reform, as combatting factionalism and pork politics has led Abe's LDP to find new ways to connect to voters and maintain power.

Not only does this book provide expert analysis of the inner party workings, it contributes towards an understanding of state-society relations, although here the emphasis is on business, professional, interest, and religious interactions with the party rather than the state. It is fascinating to see how various factions connect with non-state interests, from Koizumi challenging postal lobbies, to policy groups connected to dentists, firefighters, kindergarten teachers, truckers, and chambers of commerce. Overlapping state/society distinctions also exist subnationally, with politicians depending on personal support organizations and kinship networks. We also see changing roles for

religion, with historical LDP ties to Shinto and other interests transforming in response to the LDP's partnership with Komeito.

There are few available critiques of this masterful study. The book could do with an introduction or background chapter, bringing those less familiar with Japanese politics up to speed instead of jumping directly into factions. Readers may want more details on subnational electoral competition, especially varied local party alliances, and perhaps more on LDP foreign policy. Finally, the book has few references to scholarly theories or comparative cases. There are a few spots where glances beyond Japan might heighten its analysis, although this is probably not the author's goal in a book aimed at a Japanese audience.

All told, *The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan: The Realities of 'Power'* provides a commanding account of how the LDP has managed to maintain power in and over Japan. This will undoubtedly be required reading for students of Japanese politics, but will also be of interest to a broader audience in Comparative Politics. This is a simply excellent study that will teach a wide readership about one of Asia's most important, fascinating parties.

Shunji Fueki and Shane J. Barter,  
Soka University of America

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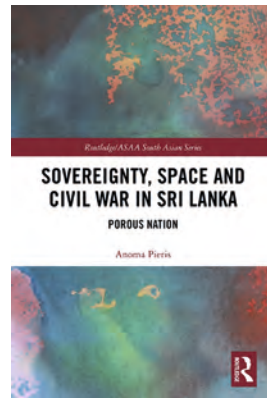


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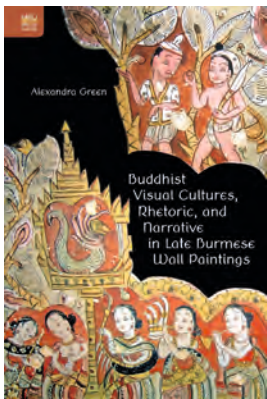


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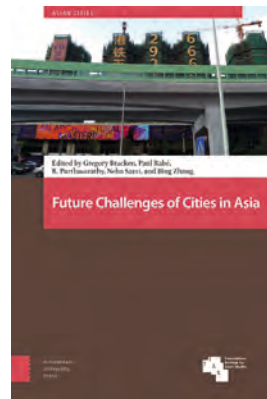


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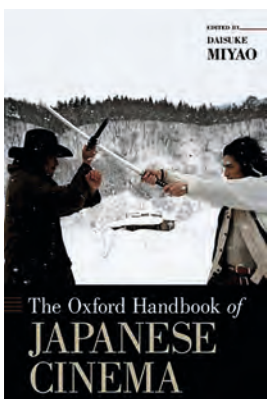


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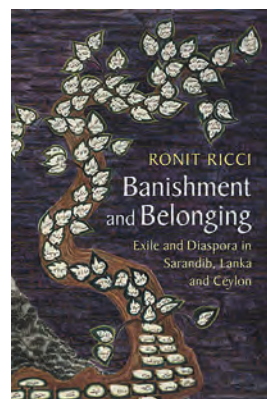
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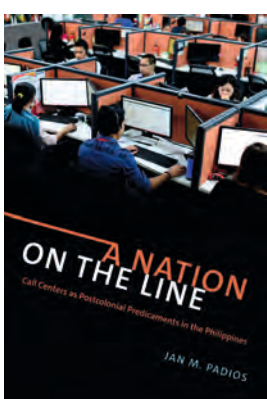


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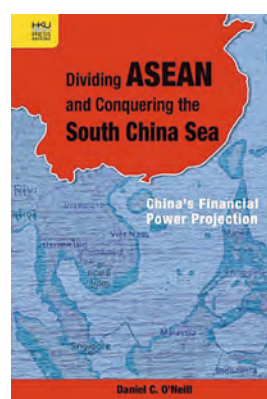


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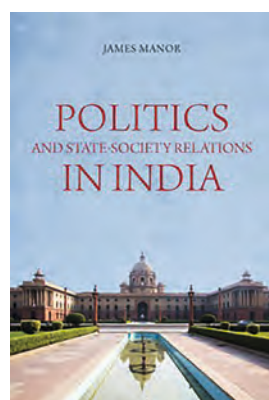


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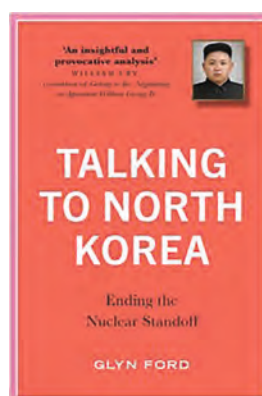


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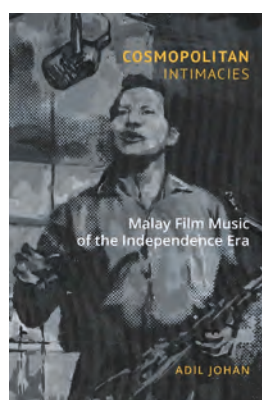
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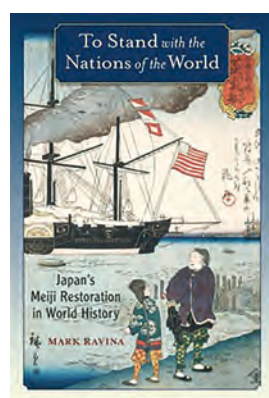
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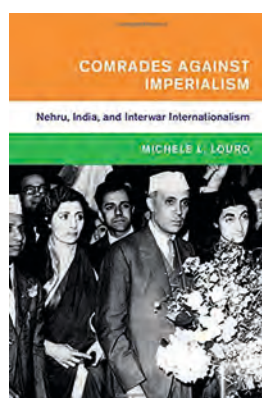


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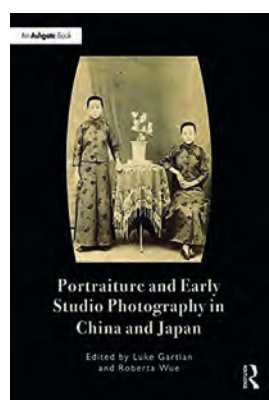


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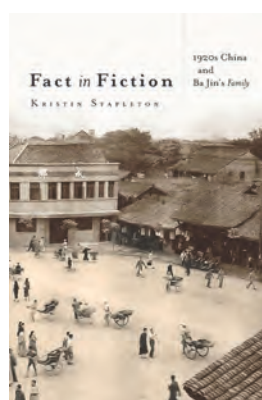
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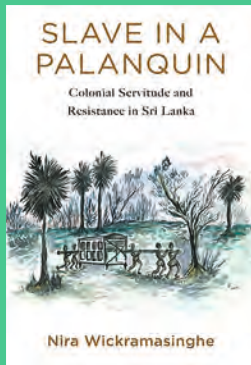
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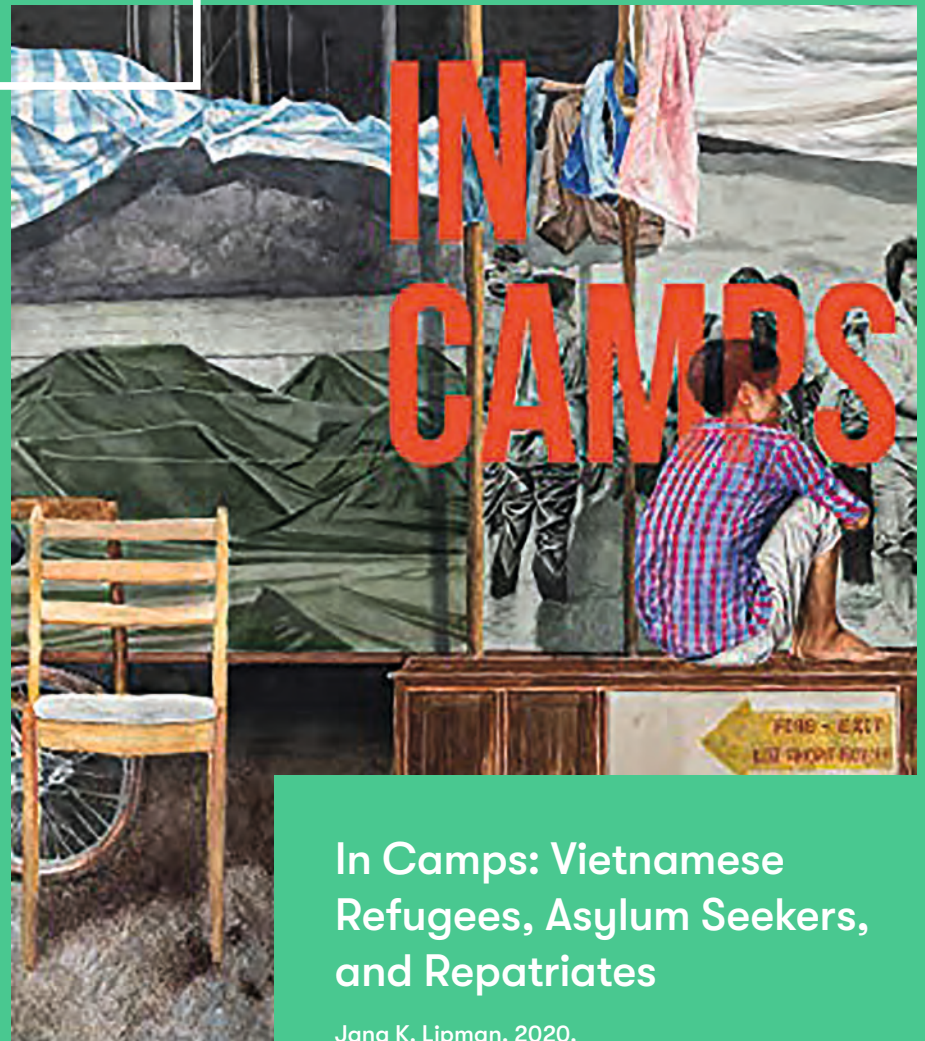
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ISBN 97780231197632  
<https://www.newbooks.asia/publication/slave-palanquin>



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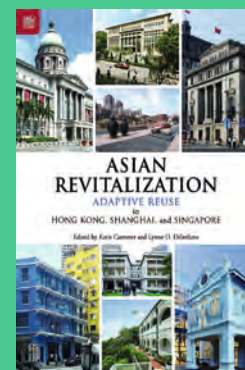
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Primordial Mother*  
Monash University Publishing  
ISBN 9781925835243  
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<https://www.newbooks.asia/publication/dying-serve>

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Nikolay Samoylov (eds). 2020.  
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Continuities, and Contingencies  
during the Twentieth Century*  
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Master: Politics of the Body  
in Hong Kong Kung Fu  
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The Politics of Caste in  
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Cambridge University Press  
ISBN 9781108779678  
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# Online resources for Asia scholars

Sonja Zweegers and Alessandra Barrow

Podcasts

News sites

Networking

Library collections

Digital collections, databases and archives

Museum digital collections

Social media and listservs

Open access blogs and journals

Webinars and MOOCs

Institutes and organisations

IIAS

During the past year not one of us has escaped the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; we were forced indoors, sequestered to our 'home offices' in order to work. Those of you used to being out in the field, roaming the earth, looking for the next research adventure, have now had to make do with Zoom meetings and Facebook groups and archival browsing. Those of us more accustomed to working out of a university building, chatting to colleagues during coffee breaks, and suffering our daily commutes, well, we too have now learned all about online meeting etiquette, and probably failing quite splendidly. The online world has become all too familiar to each and every one of us. And so, for this issue of The Newsletter, not a Focus section as you know it. Something a little bit different, designed specifically for the time in which we find ourselves: an exploration of online resources that may assist (or at least entertain) the Asia scholar.

Key used throughout this section:

**CA** Central Asia  
**SA** South Asia  
**SEA** Southeast Asia  
**EA** East Asia  
**MENA** Middle East and North Africa

To accomplish this, I reached out to IIAS alumni and fellows, and other friends made during the past 10 years as Editor of this publication. Their (your) input led to the compilation of useful spaces with regard to Asia presented on the following pages. Whilst this list is far from comprehensive, and some regions are more widely represented than others, we intend it to be a valuable start to a collection that we will continue to build upon on the IIAS website; hopefully with your help. The list is gathered by resource type, but we have tried, where possible and if relevant, to indicate to which region the resource most relates.

Throughout the collection we have added tidbits from the websites mentioned to provide some enjoyable reading in addition to the more practical information.

Finally, the pages of this Focus (and other sections in this issue) were assembled with the outstanding help of Alessandra Barrow, IIAS intern for the past few months. Alessandra is currently completing the Research Master in Asian Studies at Leiden University. I am extremely grateful to have received her assistance for this issue, especially at a time when we all might be feeling rather disconnected. Let that be a reminder to reach out and work together! And with that

in mind, if you know of any online resources that you would like to see added to this list, which we will be continuing to curate on our website, then please contact me with your ideas. You can find the ever-expanding list at [www.iias.asia/resources](http://www.iias.asia/resources).

Sonja Zweegers,  
 Editor of The Newsletter  
[s.i.zweegers@iias.nl](mailto:s.i.zweegers@iias.nl)

Alessandra Barrow,  
 Research MA Asian Studies student at Leiden University, and intern for The Newsletter. <https://linkedin.com/in/alessandra-barrow-675297172>

# Digital collections, databases and archives

## Appraising Risk SA SEA

This is a historical database of climatic crisis in the Indian Ocean World. On this site, you can access articles, relevant maps, and visualizations. The Appraising Risk Partnership is an international collaboration of scholars and researchers dedicated to exploring the critical role of climatic crisis in the past and future of the Indian Ocean World. The partnership seeks to create a comprehensive spatial and temporal database of human-environment interaction and interdependence during periods of climactic change.

<https://www.appraisingrisk.com>

## Archive of India Music SA

This site is a repository of gramophone recordings of India set up in collaboration with the Manipal University's MCPH (Manipal Centre for Philosophy and Humanities). If you wish to listen to the clips you may need to contact the archive directly.

<http://archiveofindianmusic.org>

## The Archive of the Institute for Taiwan History (ITH, Academia Sinica) EA

This website was launched in 2008. It stores personal papers and collections, family and folk papers and institutional archives that have been collected by the Archives of ITH for more than 20 years. The website can be accessed in Chinese and English.

<https://archives.ith.sinica.edu.tw>

## Archnet CA SA SEA MENA

This website is a resource focused on the Built environment of Muslim societies. Including architecture, urbanism, environmental and landscape design, visual culture, and conservation issues. It has a range of collections and books, city records, maps, architecture plans and the like.

<http://archnet.org>

## Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia SEA

This website offers access to thousands of unresearched documents about the history of the Nusantara and its connections to the world at large during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This website also gives access to some older book publications of the former 'Landsarchief', beginning with the published Daily Journals of Batavia Castle (1624-1682).

<https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id>

## ARTstor

The Artstor Digital Library features a wide range of multidisciplinary content from some of the world's top museums, artists, libraries, scholars, and photo archives, including rare collections not accessible anywhere else. New contributions are added regularly.

The Artstor Digital Library provides straightforward access to curated images from reliable sources that have been rights-cleared for use in education and research. You are free to use them in classroom instruction and handouts, presentations, student assignments, and other non-commercial educational and

scholarly activities. Artstor images come with high-quality metadata from the collection catalogers, curators, institutions, and artists themselves.

Much of the site will require a subscription, but check to see if your institute/library can grant you access. In addition, Artstor's ever-growing Public Collections offer approximately 1.3 million freely accessible images, videos, documents, and audio files from library special collections, faculty research, and institutional history materials, as well as hundreds of thousands of open access images from partner museums. Anyone may view and download these collections; no subscription or login required.

<https://www.artstor.org>

## Asia Art Archive EA SA SEA

Based in Hong Kong, Asia Art Archive is a catalyst for new ideas that enrich our understanding of the world through the collection, creation, and sharing of knowledge around recent art in Asia. This website hosts online modern Asian art and archives. It includes a range of articles and opinion pieces relating to modern art in East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia.

<https://aaa.org.hk/en>

## Atlas of Mutual Heritage SEA

This website hosts an incredible database and atlas of information, maps, drawings, prints and paintings of locations significant to the Dutch VOC (East Indies Company) and WIC (Dutch West India Company).

<https://www.atlasofmutualheritage.nl>

## Base Ulysse SEA

This is an online digital archive of the National Overseas Archives in Aix-en-Provence. It contains over 45,000 individual photographs, albums, postcards, posters, drawings and maps documenting aspects of the French colonial empire.

<http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/ulyse>

## Bichitra: Online Tagore Variorum SA

This resource contains nearly all of Tagore's writings in Bengali and English, from manuscript to print. The website can be navigated in English, Bengali and Hindi, and the search engine allows you to locate any word or phrase used in his works.

<http://bichitra.jdvu.ac.in/index.php>

## Biodiversity Heritage Library

Not Asia-specific, this site is the largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives including books on plant taxonomy and natural history texts. Most of the collection is public domain content but the BHL works with rights holders to obtain permission to make in-copyright materials openly available under Creative Commons licenses. The library has texts from 1450s to 2000s.

<https://about.biodiversitylibrary.org>



## Asia Art Archive: 'Art' and 'craft' in Sri Lanka

Annemari de Silva addresses the gendered and postcolonial valuations of 'art' and 'craft' in Sri Lanka.

The word 'entrepreneur' can mean such radically different things in a developing country. Who, for instance, is the woman entrepreneur in handicrafts in Sri Lanka? Is she the woman in the north coast, widowed by the tsunami with children to care for, the beneficiary of a programme to encourage entrepreneurialism as a poverty alleviation strategy? Or is she the woman at the local fair, selling bags she designed and made herself but can sell at a premium by

marketing them as 'designer'? Perhaps it is the woman from a family of businesspeople heading one of the biggest handloom retailers in the country?

Handicrafts, or artisanal crafts, replete with cultural significations and political uses, are not surprisingly a fairly nebulous public policy concern: in some countries, handicrafts policy falls under the domain of creative industries, while in others it remains under small industries or enterprise. Perhaps the only tacit assumption is that it's not quite mass production, nor is it automatically counted as 'fine art'. Read full article and more at:

<https://tinyurl.com/AAA-HK-DeSilva>

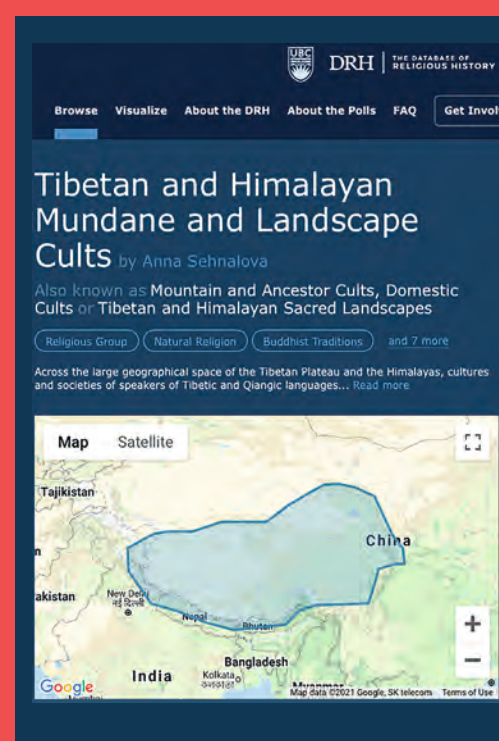
## The Database of Religious History: Pre-Buddhist cults

Entry by Anna Sehnalova

Across the large geographical space of the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalayas, cultures and societies of speakers of Tibetic and Qiangic languages share certain religious notions and similar ritual practices which do not derive from Buddhism or Yungdrung Bön (g.Yung drung Bon) but rather relate to local natural environments and social structures.

Being very variable and difficult to subsume under one term, these localised religious cults have been called 'popular' (Bell 1931), 'nameless' (Stein 1972), 'folk' (Tucci 1980), often also 'shamanism' or 'bön' (bon), and in specific cases 'pagan' (Ramble 2008) and 'mundane' (Huber 2020). They are concerned with mundane aims of well-being and prosperity, fecundity and progeniture, health, protection and warfare, and general worldly success; not with soteriology. They most likely represent indigenous, pre-Buddhist cults of Tibet and the Himalayas. Find full entry at:

<https://religiondatabase.org/browse/983>





The East Asia Image Collection  
From the Richard Mammana  
Archive: Postcard 'Calvary  
Charge', published by the Tokyo  
Daily News Company, 1904-1907.



The 'Historical Photographs of China' Project  
'The Bund, Shanghai, ca 1929', from the Teesside Archives  
collection, © 2011 British Steel Archive Project

East Asian Scroll Paintings  
Section of 'Bathing Horses',  
Zhao Mengfu, late 13th century



## British Empire and Commonwealth Collection

SA SEA EA CA

This unique resource includes objects, artworks, photographs, films, papers and sound archives. These were donated by British people who lived and worked in many parts of the former empire and Commonwealth and reflect their occupations and interests.

<https://becc.bristol.gov.uk>

## Chinese Text Project EA

This website is an open-access digital library of pre-modern Chinese texts. With over thirty thousand titles and more than five billion characters, the Chinese Text Project is also the largest database of pre-modern Chinese texts in existence.

<https://ctext.org>

## Cologne Digital Sanskrit Dictionaries SA

This website hosts lexicographic material for Indologists including dictionaries and encyclopaedias.

<https://sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de>

## The Database of Religious History EA SA SEA CA MENA

This is an excellent resource for anyone studying the history of religion. The website hosts a large database where you can search by region, for specific religions or researchers. It also includes an interactive map, breakdown of beliefs and practises and sources.

<https://religiondatabase.org>

## Delpher SEA

This is a Dutch-language site that has digitised millions of texts from scientific, library and private collections. The sources are books, newspapers, journals, magazines, radio bulletins. Most relevant for this list is that the site also has a large selection of sources from the Netherlands Indies.

<https://www.delpher.nl>

## Digital Batavia SEA

Maintained by the National Archives of Indonesia, this website includes collections of advertisements, film footage, newspaper clippings, paintings, and maps about Batavia (Jakarta), the chief port of the Netherlands' Asian trading empire.

<https://bataviadigital.perpusnas.go.id/tentang>

## Digital Himalaya SA

The Digital Himalaya project was designed as a strategy for archiving and making available ethnographic materials from the Himalayan region. The site hosts a large collection of maps, rare books and manuscripts, music and film related to the region.

<http://www.digitalhimalaya.com>

## Digital South Asia Library SA

This website is based on a two-year pilot project funded by the Association of Research Libraries' Global Resources Program that provides digital materials for reference and research on South Asia to scholars. It contains a useful collection of resource links and other websites to access for those with an interest in modern South Asian history.

<https://dsal.uchicago.edu>

## The Documentary Film Programme SA SEA

This project covers the colonial official film in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, Malaysia and India. The majority of the documents were written by government officials and deal with the use of the official film in the South and South-East Asia region over the period from 1945 to the 1970s. These documents reveal the process of colonial withdrawal from the region, the project of nation building and the role played by the official film in that. As such, they offer insight into the region at the end of empire and during the first phase of independence.

<https://digital.lib.hkbu.edu.hk/documentary-film/search.php>

## The East Asia Image Collection EA

An open-access archive of digitised photographs, negatives, postcards, rare books and slides, hosted at Lafayette College.

<https://dss.lafayette.edu/collections/east-asia-image-collection>

## East Asian Scroll Paintings (University of Chicago) EA

This website is devoted to digitizing East Asian scroll paintings. In collaboration with a number of museums including the Tokyo national museum and the Beijing Palace Museum, here you can search for specific paintings, artists, theme, period or museum.

<https://scrolls.uchicago.edu>

## Filipinas Heritage Library (SEA)

As a one-stop digital research centre on the Philippines, its mission is to spark and stoke interest in the visual, aural, and printed story of the Filipino. The website hosts a large collection of sources focused on the formative period of Philippine nationhood (1930-1950s).

<https://www.filipinaslibrary.org.ph>

## Hathi Trust Digital Library

The Hathi trust is a not-for-profit collaborative of academic and research libraries, based in the USA which began in 2008. So far, they have preserved 17+ million digitized items. The library is focused on books, journals and long-form texts and includes a substantial collection of US-Asia and Asia related texts.

<https://www.hathitrust.org>

## The 'Historical Photographs of China' Project EA

The project locates, digitises, and publishes online photographs of China held, largely, in private hands outside the country. The aim is to help make this virtual photographic archive of modern China publicly available, under a Creative Commons licence.

<https://www.hpcbristol.net>

## Indiaincine.ma SA

An annotated online archive of Indian film. It is intended to serve as a shared resource for film scholars and enthusiasts in India and beyond.

<https://indiaincine.ma>

## The International Dunhuang Project: The Silk Road Online EA

IDP is a ground-breaking international collaboration to make information and images of all manuscripts, paintings, textiles and artefacts from Dunhuang and archaeological sites of the Eastern Silk Road freely available on the Internet and to encourage their use through educational and research programmes.

<http://idp.bl.uk>

## The Internet Archive

A database of sources not covered by copyright. The Internet Archive is building a digital library of Internet sites and other cultural artifacts in digital form. Like a paper library, it provides free access to researchers, historians, scholars, the print disabled, and the general public. Its mission is to provide 'Universal Access to All Knowledge'. Anyone with a free account can access nearly 500 billion web pages, 28 million books and other texts, 14 million audio recordings, 6 million videos, 3.5 million images and over half a million software programmes.

<https://archive.org>

## KITLV Digital Resources SEA

The Royal Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) has entrusted the care of its world-famous collections to Leiden University Library, which makes it an invaluable repository. The resources include, among others, the Digital Media Library, the Chinese Indonesian Heritage Center project, and the Aceh Books collection.

<https://www.kitlv.nl/resources>



## The Public Domain Review: Japanese Firemen's Coats

During the Edo period in Japan (1615-1868), crowded living conditions and wooden buildings gave rise to frequent fires – so frequent in fact it was said that “fires and quarrels were the flowers of Edo”. The socially segregated brigades formed to combat these fires were made up of either samurais (*buke hikeshi*) or commoners (*machi hikeshi*), but whatever their class, their methods were the same: they would destroy the buildings surrounding the fire in an effort to contain it.

Although experiments with wooden pumps were made, limited water supply rendered this more modern firefighting method impractical.

Each firefighter in a given brigade was outfitted with a special reversible coat (*hikeshi banten*), plain but for the name of the brigade on one side and decorated with richly symbolic imagery on the other. Made of several layers of quilted cotton fabric, using a process called the *sashiko* technique, and resist-dyed using the *tsutsugaki* method, these coats would be worn plain-side out

and thoroughly soaked in water before the firefighters entered the scene of the blaze. No doubt the men wore them this way round to protect the dyed images from damage, but they were probably also concerned with protecting themselves, as they went about their dangerous work, through direct contact with the heroes and creatures represented on the insides of these beautiful garments.

<https://tinyurl.com/TPDR-JapaneseFirecoats>

## Rare Books Society of India: A Zebra



A Zebra, by Mansur, opaque water-colour and gold on paper, Mughal, 1621. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The zebra in this painting was presented to the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) by Mir Ja'far who had acquired it from some Turks who had travelled to India from Africa. Jahangir wrote on the painting (in Persian, the court language) that it was: “A mule which the Turks in the company of Mir Ja'far had brought from Abyssinia in the year 1030 [1620-21], completed by Nader al-Asri [Wonder of the Age], Ustad Mansur”.

When Jahangir had carefully examined it, and ensured that it was not, as some thought, a horse on which someone had painted stripes, he decided to send it to Shah Abbas of Iran, with whom he often exchanged rare or exotic presents.

The painting is part of a group known as the Minto Album, now divided between the V&A and the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, all of which were done for Jahangir or his son, Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658).

<https://tinyurl.com/RBSI-Zebra>

## The Loewentheil Photography of China Collection EA

This is the largest collection of early photography of China in the world. These include a large collection of historical photographs taken Beijing and Shanghai taken from the 1850s through the 1930s, to access some of the collection you need to contact the organization directly.

<https://loewentheilcollection.com>

## Malay Concordance Project SEA

This website is a project that aims to help scholars share resources for the study of classical Malay literature. It has a large collection of pre-modern Malay written text and articles.

<http://mcp.anu.edu.au/Q/mcp.html>

## The Museum of Material Memory SA

This is a digital repository that preserves a wide range of material culture, in the form of heirlooms, collectibles and antiques, from the Indian subcontinent. The repository builds on posts from contributors from all over the world, who share stories of the objects in their collection. By tracing histories of objects and family histories, the site aims to explore narratives of tradition, culture and society of the subcontinent.

<http://www.museumofmaterialmemory.com>

## National Digital Library of India SA

The NDLI is a virtual repository of learning resources which is not just a repository with search/browse facilities but provides

a host of services for the scholarly community. It is designed to enable people to learn and prepare from best practices from all over the world and to facilitate researchers to perform inter-linked exploration from multiple sources.

<https://ndl.iitkgp.ac.in>

## New Silk Road (NSR) at IIAS EA CA SA

Based at IIAS in Leiden, the New Silk Road project is dedicated to promoting evidence research and education on national and international efforts to improve the infrastructure and connectivity among the countries of Asia and Europe. It brings together over 750 teachers and researchers from a wide range of disciplines and working in over 80 countries. Membership is open to all.

The site hosts eight different e-libraries, educational resources, with articles and news related to China's BRI, Youtube lectures and podcasts.

<https://newsilkroads.info>

## The Open Heritage 3D Project CA SA EA

As 3D data capture becomes an increasingly common method for the documentation of cultural heritage there has emerged a growing need to assist with the distribution and open access of this growing library of 3D data while maintaining scientific rigor, respecting cultural and ethical sensitivities, enhancing discoverability, and addressing data longevity and archival standards. In response to these areas of need, the Open Heritage 3D project was developed to make primary 3D cultural heritage data open and accessible and remove the barriers for content producers to publish their data.

<https://openheritage3d.org>

## The Panjab Digital Library SA

This digital archive holds sources relating to the Punjab area and Sikhs, including manuscripts, books, magazines, newspapers, photographs and pamphlets. Some of the resources are limited to specific organisations and registered users, registration is free.

<http://www.panjabdigilib.org>

## The 1947 Partition Archive SA

What began as an idea in 2008 to acknowledge and popularize the people's history of Partition has been accomplished through the founding and building of 'The 1947 Partition Archive', which has preserved nearly 9,500 memories of Partition witnesses. Through the sharing of thousands of witness accounts millions of times over the last decade, the 'people's history' of Partition has been established and is now a growing and active area of research as well as new documentation efforts.

<https://www.1947partitionarchive.org>

## People's Archive of Rural India SA

PARI is a living journal and an archive, and they are currently creating a database of published stories, reports, videos and audio recordings. In addition, PARI hosts video, photo, audio and text archives on rural India. PARI's content comes under the Creative Commons and the site is free to access. PARI is also open to new contributors to write and record.

<https://ruralindiaonline.org/en>

## Philippine E-Journals SEA

This is an online collection of academic publications from various higher education

institutions and professional organisations. The database allows users to easily locate abstracts, full journal articles, and research materials.

<https://ejournals.ph>

## PressReader.com

Not Asia specific, but with a subscription to this all-you-can-read service you will gain access to thousands of newspapers and magazines from more than 120 countries. PressReader's proprietary technology makes it possible to process thousands of newspapers every single day, extracting text and images and making articles instantly translatable, searchable, and easy to read on mobile devices. Many libraries across the globe have a subscription to this site, granting library members access through their connection.

<https://www.pressreader.com/catalog>

## The Public Domain Review

Not Asia specific, but this informative and highly entertaining site includes nearly 1000 annotated collections of images, books, and film from the public domain. You can also browse the current articles on themes including art, film, music, philosophy, religion and legends, and science, among others. If you prefer print to digital, head to the site's 'shop' and order one of the 'Selected Essays' printed volumes, public domain 'fine art prints', or curated postcard packs.

<https://publicdomainreview.org>

## Rare Books Society of India SA

This site is a virtual space for rare book collectors and history buffs to read, discuss, rediscover and download lost books, paintings, photographs and other objects. Importantly, it aims to highlight the understanding that



there is always more than one truth in history! Sourcing from digital libraries such as The Internet Archive, Google Books, Wikipedia and the online collections of various museums around the world, RBSI has curated these rare books and images, and presented them in a context that gives them relevance and shows each piece as a part of a grander whole. All material posted on this site is sourced from the public domain and Rare Book Society of India explicitly states that it does not hold copyrights on any of this material.

<https://www.rarebooksocietyofindia.org>

## Reconnecting Asia

EA SA SEA CA

Reconnecting Asia maps new linkages—roads, railways, and other infrastructure—that are reshaping economic and geopolitical realities across the continent. Through data curation and objective analysis, the project aims to fill Asia's infrastructure-information gap, squaring lofty ambitions with facts on the ground. The project site offers analyses, maps and databases – and also provides masterclasses in the topics.

<https://reconnectingasia.csis.org>

## Researching Colonial History of the Malay World like a Millennial

SEA

This is a fabulous new resource and guide from the Cultural Centre of the University of Malaya. The focus of this resource guide is on digital resources that tell us something about the Malay Archipelago, stretching back to the 17th century. The guide also offers tips and ideas on how to find materials online, an introduction to historical thinking, as well as a guide to various communities, projects and initiatives related to the colonial history of the Malay World.

<https://tinyurl.com/likeamillennial>

## SEAlang projects

SEA

This website hosts Southeast Asian language reference materials. The organization is focused on non-roman script languages, though more recently they have expanded their collection to include many languages of insular Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The website contains a number of bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, and tools for searching and displaying complex scripts.

<http://www.sealang.net>

## The SOAS Digital Collections

EA SA SEA CA

SOAS digital collections include archives and manuscripts, photographs, maps, books and journals, newspapers, oral histories, films and audio. Nearly all are available freely, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, all year round. While some of this content is protected by copyright, all of it can be used with attribution under Creative Commons licence CC BY-NC. You can browse according to discipline or geographic region, and among the archives and special collections. There is also a large section of language resources (e.g., Swahili, Rawang, Telugu, Urdu, Pali, Buriat, Batak, etc.)

<https://digital.soas.ac.uk>

## South Asia Archive

SA

The South Asia Archive provides an extensive resource for students and scholars across the humanities and social sciences. Focusing on South Asia, the Archive contains both serial and non-serial materials, including reports, rare books, and journal runs from noteworthy, rare publications. The South Asia Archive is a specialist digital platform providing global electronic access to culturally and historically significant literary material produced from within, and about, the South Asian region. It is not merely a repository, but

a vehicle for targeted research, and one which has been intelligently structured to ensure efficient content discovery. The site is hosted by Routledge/Taylor&Francis, and you will need a subscription to access the content.

<https://www.southasiaarchive.com>

## South Asia Open Archives on JStor

SA

This is a free open-access resource for research and teaching on South Asia in English and other regional languages. SAOA's collection contains a number of books, journals, newspapers, census data, magazines, and documents, with particular focus on social and economic history, literature, women and gender, and caste and social structure.

<https://www.jstor.org/site/south-asia-open-archives>

## TANAP Databases

SEA

The archives of the VOC (Dutch East Indies Company). The website is in Dutch and English and contains an exhaustive list of digitised VOC documents and descriptions.

<http://databases.tanap.net/ead>

## Things That Talk

This platform explores the humanities through the life of objects. This site is funded by Leiden University and explores the context and stories of objects old and new. They are open to new curators so if you have an object you would like to discuss you can contact them!

<https://thingsthattalk.net>

## Wilson Center Digital Archive

SEA EA

The Digital Archive, overseen by the Wilson Center's History and Public Policy Program, contains once-secret documents from governments all across the globe, uncovering new sources and providing fresh insights into the history of international relations and diplomacy. The collection contains newly declassified historical materials from archives around the world—much of it in translation and including diplomatic cables, high level correspondence, meeting minutes and more. The website has a particular focus on Southeast Asia, East Asia, the Korean war, and the history of Nuclear proliferation.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org>

## World Digital Library

The World Digital Library (WDL) was launched by the U.S. Library of Congress and UNESCO, with contributions from libraries, archives, museums, educational institutions, and international organizations around the world. Its intent is to preserve and share some of the world's most important cultural objects, increasing access to cultural treasures and significant historical documents to enable discovery, scholarship, and use. The materials collected by the WDL make it possible to discover, study, and enjoy cultural treasures and significant historical documents including books, manuscripts, maps, newspapers, journals, prints and photographs, sound recordings, and films. Material on specific topics can be found by using the site's search and filter features. For example, you can search by region, topic and/or time period.

<https://www.wdl.org>

## Reconnecting Asia: Belt, Road, and Beyond

The CSIS Belt and Road Executive Course

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a \$1 trillion flagship foreign policy effort of Chinese leader Xi Jinping, could reshape global networks of trade, transport, and political ties within and between countries for decades to come. But since its announcement, the BRI has remained shrouded in confusion and controversy, and it now faces major challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic. Drawing insights from leading experts and the Reconnecting Asia Project, the most extensive effort to map and analyze these developments to date, CSIS has developed a Master's-level introduction to China's BRI. This private, virtual course explains what the BRI is, what it is not, and how it is impacting commercial and strategic realities on the ground. Check back for Fall 2021 course dates, coming soon!

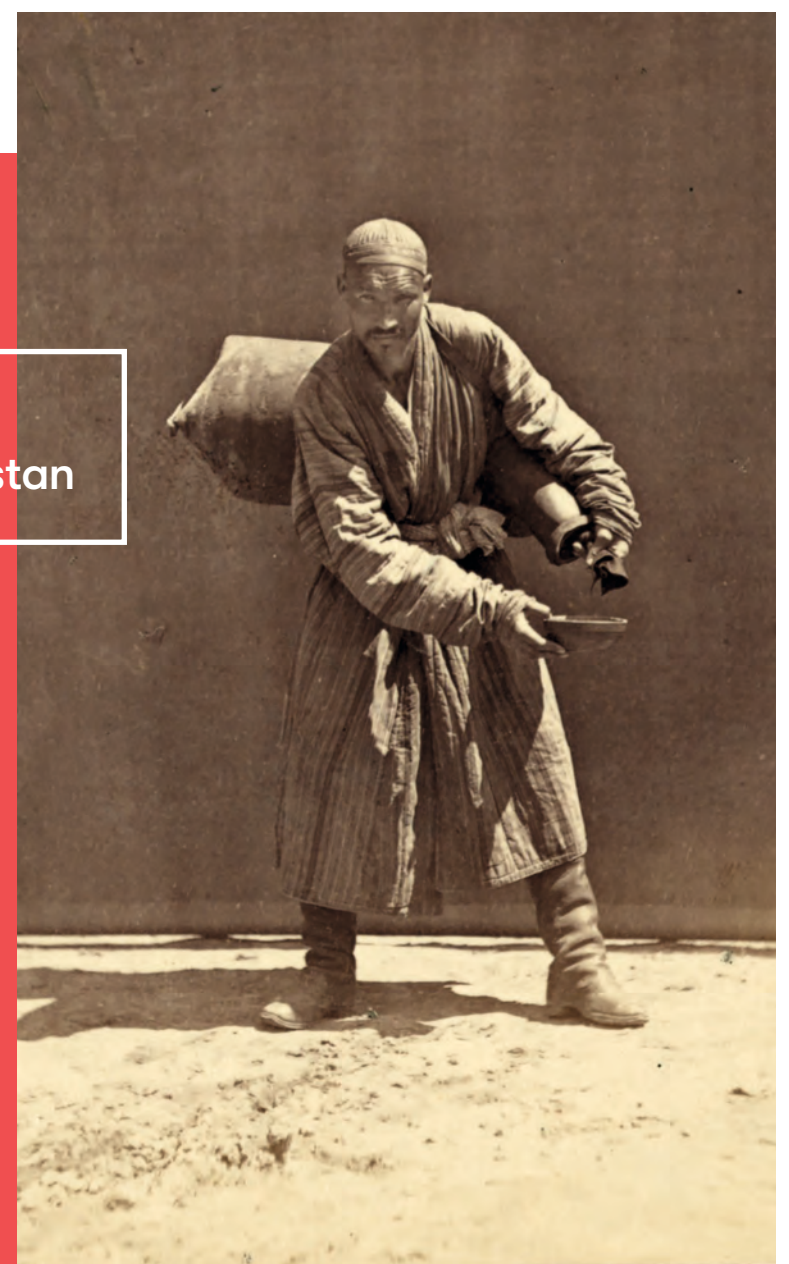
<https://tinyurl.com/CSIS-BRBCourse>



## World Digital Library: Ethnographical Turkestan

This photograph is from the ethnographical part of Turkestan Album, a comprehensive visual survey of Central Asia undertaken after imperial Russia assumed control of the region in the 1860s. Commissioned by General Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman (1818–82), the first governor-general of Russian Turkestan, the album is in four parts spanning six volumes: 'Archaeological Part' (two volumes); 'Ethnographic Part' (two volumes); 'Trades Part' (one volume); and 'Historical Part' (one volume). The principal compiler was Russian Orientalist Aleksandr L. Kun, who was assisted by Nikolai V. Bogavskii. The album contains some 1,200 photographs, along with architectural plans, watercolor drawings, and maps. The 'Ethnographic Part' includes 491 individual photographs on 163 plates. The photographs show individuals representing the different peoples of the region (Plates 1–33); daily life and rituals (Plates 34–91); and views of villages and cities, street vendors, and commercial activities (Plates 92–163).

<https://tinyurl.com/WDL-SyrDaryaOblast>



Above: 'Syr Darya Oblast. City of Dzhizak and the Types of People Seen at the Market. Water Carrier'. Found by searching on 'place': Uzbekistan.

# Institutes and organisations

## The Ancient India & Iran Trust

SA CA MENA

This organisation, in Cambridge (UK), occupies a unique position as an independent charity concerned with the study of early South Asia, Iran and Central Asia, promoting both scholarly research and popular interest in the area. Its primary focus is prehistory, archaeology, art history, linguistics and ancient languages, but this often extends to more modern topics and other disciplines. It has a library of over 50,000 items and organises a range of activities including conferences, public lectures and visiting fellowships.

<https://www.indiran.org>

## The Asia Research Institute (ARI) SA EA SEA

ARI, at the National University of Singapore, engages the humanities and social sciences broadly defined and especially interdisciplinary frontiers between and beyond disciplines. As a university-level institute, ARI brings together scholars from different departments, schools and faculties across campus for seminars, conferences and collaborative research projects. The institute hosts visiting researchers, organises events and maintains an academic blog called ARIScope. Its publishing department produces working papers, manuscripts, a number of journals and a Newsletter.

<https://ari.nus.edu.sg>

## British Institute of Persian Studies MENA SA

The British Institute of Persian Studies (BIPS) is the UK's foremost learned society dedicated to promoting and supporting scholarship and research excellence on all aspects of Iran and the wider Persianate world, and to increasing public understanding and knowledge of this region. The Persianate world includes territories historically associated with Persian and Iranian culture and language: Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Transcaucasia, Iraq, the Persian Gulf littoral, and South Asia. BIPS supports humanities and social sciences research into this region.

BIPS supports UK-based post-doctoral researchers and UK-based students to carry out humanities and social science research into Iran and the Persianate world through the award of research and travel grants. BIPS usually invites grant applications three times a year – in January, April and October.

<https://www.bips.ac.uk>

## Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University (CSEAS) SEA

CSEAS offers a wide range of resources, education and events, with a focus on Southeast Asia. Find for example, their tremendous Newsletter here: <https://newsletter.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp>. The Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia: <https://kyotoreview.org>; and the CSEAS Online Movie Project: <https://onlinemovie.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en/index.html>.

Also hosted at CSEAS is The Maritime Asia Heritage Survey (MAHS), which builds upon

the pilot project that was based at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies to expand the work of digitally documenting historical and archaeological sites across the broader region of maritime Southern Asia, including new field survey work in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Brunei, and Vietnam <http://maritimeasiaheritage.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp>. See the article by Michael Feener et al. on page 46 of this issue to read more about this survey.

<https://en.kyoto.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp>

## The Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS) in Heidelberg SA SEA EA

CATS is an Asia centre of a different kind. It is committed to studying Asia in a global context and through interdisciplinary dialogue. In CATS, four institutes from Heidelberg University, whose regional focus is Asia, are joined together. Scholars at CATS are specialized in a variety of disciplines such as Anthropology, Geography, History, Cultural Studies, Art History, Literary Studies, Musicology, Religious Studies, Politics, Sociology, among others. The centre maintains research projects, a media centre, a 'digital humanities unit', various BA and MA degree programmes, and has recently inaugurated their Newsletter: CATSarena.

<https://www.cats.uni-heidelberg.de/media/catsarena.html>

## Clingendael Institute for International Relations SA EA SEA CA

Clingendael experts conduct policy-oriented analysis and research on strategic international issues. They offer policy recommendations through our publications, events and presence in the media. Clingendael Academy is one of the largest international diplomatic training centres around the world. Every day, international professionals experience their unique training philosophy. The institute organises numerous events and publishes prolifically, including 'The Clingendael Spectator', the think tank's magazine, which is freely accessible for all with an interest in current developments concerning world politics.

<https://www.clingendael.org>

## Institute for South Asia Studies UC Berkeley SA

This site includes a large selection of online resources, produced by the institute and recommended by the institute, dedicated to South Asia. Including a wide range of lecture videos, podcasts, blog articles and interviews with well-known South Asianists.

<https://southasia.berkeley.edu>

## International Institute of Social History

The IISH is a distinctive institute, serving science and society on a global scale. At an international level, its research staff generates and offers reliable information and insights about the (long-term) origins, effects and consequences of social inequality. The institute holds nearly 5000 archives,

more than one million printed volumes and an equivalent number of audio-visual items, including many posters. Users can browse the institute's thousands of datasets, which include millions of records on demographics, inequality, prices, wages, national accounts, labour relations, etc. IISH is one of the world's main data hubs on socioeconomic history.

<https://iisg.amsterdam/en>

## ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute SEA

ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute is a research centre in Singapore, offering multiple projects, publications, and online resources: such as their commentaries at <https://fulcrum.sg>; or their analyses of current affairs, or more in-depth analyses of contemporary geopolitical and socio-economic forces in the region - all to be found at:

<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/category/articles-commentaries>  
<https://www.iseas.edu.sg>

## The Kern Institute SA

This organization supports and promotes the study of South Asia, in particular India and Tibet. It organises lectures and excursions, provides subsidies for study trips, supports the expansion and public use of its library collections, and brings out a Newsletter and other publications.

<https://www.instituutkern.nl>

## LeidenAsiaCentre EA

The aim of the LeidenAsiaCentre is to generate academic knowledge on modern East Asia that can find societal applications in the Netherlands. The LeidenAsiaCentre actively aims to expand its expertise and to use this in collaboration with a growing number of diverse societal partners, in particular the business sector, the social midfield, the media, governments and academic and non-academic knowledge centres. Visit the site to find out more about their projects and publications.

<https://leidenasiacentre.nl/en>



## Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) (Berlin) EA

MERICS has established itself as the go-to European think tank on China. With about 20 full-time research staff from different disciplines, MERICS is currently the largest European research institute focusing solely on contemporary China studies. Based in Berlin, MERICS plays an active role in informing European public debates on China and in providing senior decision-makers across Europe with in-depth China-related insights critical to their portfolios. Visit the site to explore their policy briefs, briefings, analyses, opinion pieces, etc.

<https://merics.org/en>

## OXUS Society for Central Asian Affairs CA

The Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs is a DC-based non-profit organization dedicated to fostering academic exchange between Central Asia and the rest of the world. Oxus provides a platform for early career researchers, practitioners and established academics by publishing research on the politics, economics, cultures, history and societies of Central Asia. Oxus compiles original datasets and develops analytical tools to help advance understanding of the latest developments in the region. Oxus organizes workshops focused on research ethics, methods, data analysis and publishing for researchers working on Central Asia. Subscribe to their Newsletter to stay updated.

<https://oxussociety.org>

## Policy Forum SEA SA EA

This is the website of the Asia and the Pacific Policy Society based at the Australia National University. The Asia and the Pacific Policy Society is a community of scholars, policymakers, researchers, students and the policy-engaged public. The Website hosts episodes of 4 podcast series and publishes articles on topics such as national security, arts and culture and the belt and road initiative.

<https://www.policyforum.net>

## The Textile Research Centre

Based in Leiden, the Netherlands, the basic aim of the TRC is to give the study of textiles, clothing and accessories their proper place in the field of the humanities and social sciences. The TRC does so by providing courses and lectures, carrying out research and by the presentation of textiles and dress from all over the world. The two main focal points of the TRC are (a) dress and identity: what people wear in order to say who they are and (b) pre-industrial textile technology. The TRC has a large textile-based archive, much of which is now available online via their website.

<https://www.trc-leiden.nl>

## Tracing Patterns Foundation SEA

Tracing Patterns Foundation (TPF) is a community of international scholars and textile makers (weavers, dyers, craftspeople, textile designers) who contribute towards building a body of research on both traditional and contemporary textiles around the world. TPF is a collaboration of like-minded people who are passionate about textiles, production processes, weaving and dyeing techniques, symbols, patterns, cultural meanings, art, and history. TPF also provides an institutional home for researchers seeking to conduct original field research. The foundation maintains a blog, a mentorship program, a number of museum projects and also organises events.

<https://tracingpatterns.org>



## TU Delft Spatial Planning

Though not Asia specific, the website of the Spatial Planning & Strategy department at the Delft University of Technology presents their international research, book updates, blog posts and links to events.

<http://www.spatialplanningtudelft.org>

# Library collections

## Bibliothèque nationale de France

The national library of France. This site gives access to a number of digitised collections and archives. The website is accessible in both French and English, although the English is poorly translated in places. The site also published a number of articles and free access to manuscripts.

<https://tinyurl.com/Gallica-BNF-EN>

## Bodleian Library

This library has almost a million images of rare books, manuscripts, and other treasures from the Bodleian Libraries and Oxford college libraries. Specific South & Southeast Asia, and East Asia collections are presented alongside a number of other regional collections.

<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>

## Endangered Archives Programme

This project of the British Library gives grants to organisations to catalogue, preserve, and digitize archives in danger from across the world. Thanks to this scheme, over eight million images and 25 thousand soundtracks have been digitized till date. Collections span South Asia, Southeast Asia, and beyond.

<https://eap.bl.uk/search/site>

## Laures Kirishitan Bunko Database

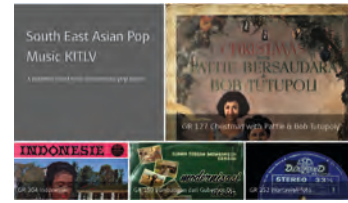
The materials contained in the database are collected and managed by Kirishitan Bunko Library of Sophia University. The focus of the collection is Japanese missionary items.

<https://digital-archives.sophia.ac.jp>

## Leiden University Libraries Digital Collections

This website is the digitised and digital born collections of Leiden University Libraries. A number of the collections are Asia specific, such as the 'Balinese narrative drawings', 'Southeast Asian pop music', 'Colonial sources', 'Japanese agriculture in the early 19th century' and the 'Kong Koan papers'.

<https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl>



## Library of Congress Chinese Rare Book Digital Collection

This is the website of the Chinese Rare Book Digital Collection which draws from 5,300 titles of Chinese rare books housed at the Asian Division of the Library of Congress. The collection brings together printed books, manuscripts, Buddhist sutras and local gazetteers among other items. These materials encompass a wide array of disciplines and subjects in classics, history, geography, philosophy, and literature.

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/chinese-rare-books>

## The Miguel de Cervantes Virtual Library

This site can be accessed in Spanish. It is a digital archive and library and includes a history portal where you can find documents on Spanish colonialism. In addition, the site incorporates the archives of many Spanish libraries and museums. This site is connected with the Spanish State Archives, accessible in both Spanish and English, which can be accessed here <http://pares.culturaydeporte.gob.es/pares/en/inicio.html>

<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com>

## Monash Collections Online

Monash University Library's Special Collections are an integral part of the Library, spanning multiple genres and mediums. The largest of the Special Collections held at the Matheson Library are the Rare Books, Music and Multimedia, and Asian collections. The Slavic, Asian, Yiddish language and Jewish studies collections are also among the largest in Australasia. The collections include purchases, gifts, and donations, and are part of ongoing activities to promote the University's research outputs. We are selectively digitising these collections to better enable access to these unique and valuable research materials. Monash Collections Online is the new home for the discovery, access, and engagement with these digitised collections. Most items are available to download and reuse, unless otherwise stated.

<https://repository.monash.edu>



## Monash Collections Online: Japanese Fairy Tales

Effectively ending their self-isolation from the western world in 1853, Japan inevitably became the object of fascination for much of the English-speaking world. Innovative publisher and book importer, Hasegawa Takejiro, took advantage of this interest, producing the attractive and collectable, Japanese Fairy Tale Series (1885 - 1925). Initially, these 'fukuro toji', or, bound-pocket books were produced for improving English literacy

among the Japanese, however, the series became hugely popular in the West. The influx of 'Yatoi' or foreigners employed by the Japanese government, saw Hasegawa develop key relationships with Western intellectuals, academics, and entrepreneurs. Read full description and find all items in this collection at:

<https://repository.monash.edu/collections/show/108>

## Endangered Archives Programme: Digitising Cirebon manuscripts

Cirebon was one of the important Islamic Sultanates in Java, together with Demak and Banten, and had been a centre for Islamic learning and the dissemination of Islamic teachings in West Java. Cirebon was also considered to be one of the cultural centres in the Indonesian archipelago, which can be seen in its manuscripts.

These Cirebon manuscripts will contribute towards the understanding of Islamic intellectual and cultural heritages, and will

help to reconstruct how Islam spread in West Java in the period of the 15th century to the first half of the 20th century. According to the latest survey, Cirebon manuscripts are mostly damaged because of inappropriate treatment and natural causes. Others were neglected due to a lack of knowledge about the storage and handling of manuscripts. Read full text at:

<https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP211>





## National Library of Singapore BiblioAsia: 'Let there be light'

Published on BiblioAsia: 'Let There Be Light', by Timothy Pwee, 1 January 2021.

Timothy Pwee enlightens us about the history of street lighting in Singapore, starting with the first flickering oil lamps that were lit in 1824.

There is something special about Singapore at night. The glittering skyline of the Central Business District and Marina Bay is now an iconic image, while the annual festive light-ups of Orchard Road, Chinatown, Geylang Serai and Serangoon Road never fail to draw a crowd intent on taking selfies and wefies.

Singapore did not always sparkle after dark though. The first streetlights relied on feeble, flickering oil lamps, which were

joined by gas-lit lamps in the second half of the 19th century. Even then, street lighting was limited to major areas in town. Streetlamps running on electricity were introduced in the early 20th century but there were not very many of these back then. It was only after World War II that the authorities came up with plans to ensure that all of Singapore's streets would be lit at night. Read full article at:

<https://tinyurl.com/BiblioAsia-Pwee>

Above: Lighted torches illuminating the evening sky as coolies transport coal to refuel a ship, c. 1876. This illustration first appeared in *The Graphic* on 4 November 1876. Courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

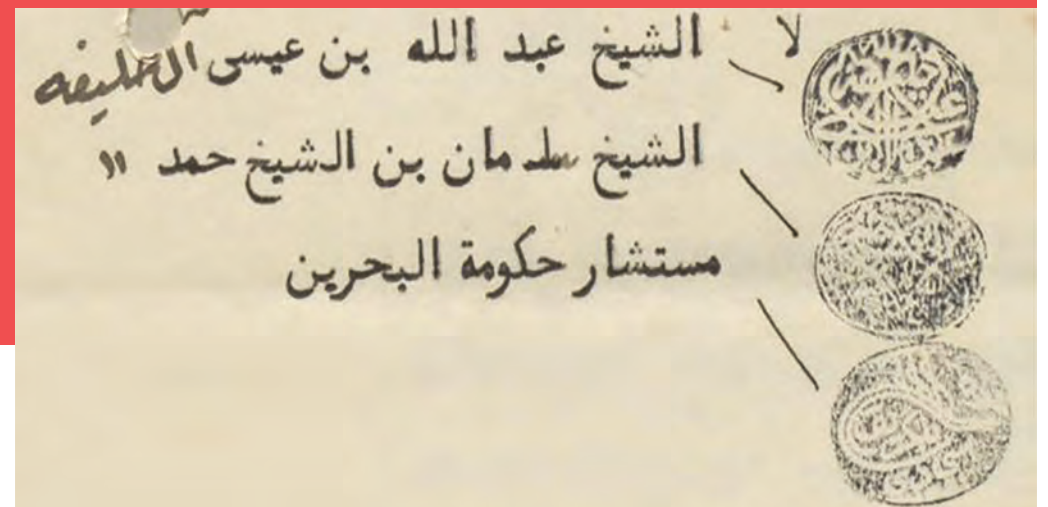
## Qatar Digital Library: The use of 'Islamic' seals

'Performing Authority: the 'Islamic' Seals of British Colonial Officers', by Daniel A. Lowe

Cultural appropriation was as much a part of empire as military force. The use of 'Islamic' seals by British colonial officials is one example of this. In his record of nineteenth century Egyptian society, Edward William Lane wrote that '[a]lmost every person who can afford it has a seal-ring, even though he be a servant'. The function of seals as symbols of textual authority and ownership is deeply rooted in the Islamic world, especially in Arabic and Persian-speaking societies. Historically, seals were used for authorising various documents, including letters and legal contracts, and for marking the ownership of books and manuscripts. Read full entry at:

<https://tinyurl.com/ODL-Lowe>

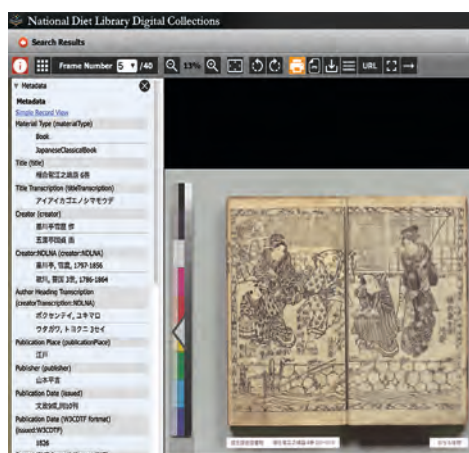
Below: Detail of a letter from the Regency Council (majlis al-wisāyah), dated 30 January 1938, bearing the seals of Shaikh 'Abdullah bin 'Isa Al Khalifah (top), Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifah (middle) and Charles Dalrymple Belgrave (bottom). IOR/R/15/2/181, f. 39r.



## National Diet Library (NDL) Japan EA

This library can be accessed in Japanese or English and is predominantly text based but includes over 600 audio-visual recordings. The archive also publishes the National Diet Library monthly bulletin each month, which provides comprehensive information about the NDL's collection of books and its services: digitised versions of rare books, periodicals, dissertations, gazettes, political materials, music manuscripts, maps, and many more.

<https://dl.ndl.go.jp>



## National Library of Singapore BiblioAsia EA SEA

This site hosts the newsletter of the National Library of Singapore's archive. BiblioAsia features articles on the history, culture and heritage of Singapore within the larger Asian context, and has a strong focus on the collections and services of the National Library. The National Library of Singapore also maintains a few YouTube channels featuring a collection of lectures and talks across a wide range of topics including history, art, and current events.

<https://biblioasia.nlb.gov.sg>  
<https://www.youtube.com/NationalLibrarySG>

## OAPEN - Online library and publication platform

OAPEN promotes and supports the transition to open access for academic books by providing open infrastructure services to stakeholders in scholarly communication. They work with publishers to build a quality-controlled collection of open access books and provide services for publishers, libraries, and research funders in the areas of hosting, deposit, quality assurance, dissemination, and digital preservation. Browse by 'subject', 'publisher', 'language', or 'collection' – for example: 'Asian history', which has about 250 titles included.

<https://oapen.org>

## Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

The Austrian National Archives can be accessed in German and English. The collection is being digitised in conjunction with Google and includes titles from the early 16th century up to the second half of the 19th century. From this site you can also access physical books and journals that can be picked up from the associated Austrian libraries.

<https://tinyurl.com/ONB-ANA>

## Qatar Digital Library MENA CA SA

This website is an archive featuring the cultural and historical records of the Gulf and wider region. It is hosted in partnership with the British Library. The sources are freely available online for the first time. The archives include maps, manuscripts, sound recordings, photographs and much more, complete with contextualised explanatory notes and links, in both English and Arabic.

<https://www.qdl.qa/en>

## Smithsonian Libraries

The network of 21 specialized research libraries that make up the Smithsonian Libraries provide the Institution's museums and research centers with resources and services that are as diverse and deep as the collections, exhibits, and scholarship they support. They truly span the range of scientific and cultural pursuits of humanity from aerospace, anthropology, and art history to business history and botany, cultural history, design, philately, zoology, and much, much more. These websites include a vast collection of public domain books and images. The digital collections include over 35,000 digitised books and manuscripts as well as digitised photo collections, ephemera, and seed catalogs. Many of the physical collections have not yet been digitised, but you can browse the physical inventories of those collections on the website.

<https://library.si.edu>



# Museum digital collections

## The British Museum

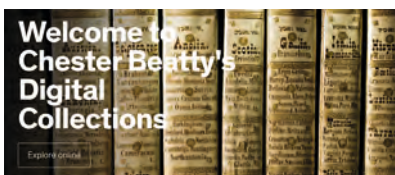
The British Museum's website has a large array of online resources, images of over two million records and artifacts. The site also includes a large collection of articles and explanation of artifacts (Collection Stories), with around 600,000 thousand records linked to Asia.

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection>

## Chester Beatty Museum

More than a museum with outstanding collections, including those from Asia, Chester Beatty is also a research library for scholars from all over the world. Collections and exhibitions are displayed online, alongside a range of educational resources.

<https://chesterbeatty.ie>



## Cleveland Museum of Art

EA SA SEA CA

The Cleveland museum website contains a collection of their artifacts and records that have been digitised including a number that are linked to Asia. The museum particularly has a large collection of textile and art artifacts.

<https://www.clevelandart.org>

## Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York)

Since 2017, the Met has made all images of public-domain works in its collection available under Creative Commons Zero (CC0), so around 406,000 images of artworks are freely available for use.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection>

## National Palace Museum (Taipei) EA

Digital archives from the National Palace Museum in Taipei. From 2015 the National Palace Museum has made all images on the site free to download (CC BY 4.0). You can search by dynasty or category. Head to the tab 'Open Data' on the site.

<https://theme.npm.edu.tw>

## Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (Kansas City) EA SEA SA

The Nelson-Atkins Museum has various collections of images available online, some of which in the public domain. This includes large East Asia, and South & Southeast Asia collections.

<https://art.nelson-atkins.org/collections>

## The Palace Museum (Beijing) EA

Established in 1925, the Palace Museum is located in the imperial palace of the

consecutive Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. The magnificent architectural complex, also known as the Forbidden City, and the vast holdings of paintings, calligraphy, ceramics, and antiquities of the imperial collections make it one of the most prestigious museums in China and the world. Fun item on website: download beautiful high-resolution images for free to use as desktop 'wallpaper' or to print out.

<https://en.dpm.org.cn>

## The Rijksmuseum

The National museum of the Netherlands, featuring not only the Dutch masters, but a comprehensive and representative overview of Dutch art and history from the Middle Ages onwards, and of major aspects of European and Asian art. The museum's website is a playground for art lovers and for those wanting to learn and discover.

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en>

## Shanghai Museum (Shanghai) EA

With a focus on collecting, researching, displaying and education of pre-modern Chinese arts, the Museum has built up a collection of nearly 1,020,000 items. Its multimedia section includes stunning videos introducing you to their exhibitions and collections.

<https://www.shanghaimuseum.net/mu/frontend/pg/en/collection/index>



Above: One of the two impressive temple guardians of the Asian Pavilion in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.



Above: Painting of a Travelling Monk, Sourced from The British Museum digital collection story 'Exploring the Silk Roads'. Found at the Library Cave, Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, Gansu province, China, about 851-900. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons license.



Above: Downloadable wallpaper image from The Palace Museum Beijing.

# Networking

## Academia

A networking website for academics, it can be used to access and promote academic papers. Academia's goal is to ensure that every paper, ever written, is on the internet, available for free. It aims to build the fastest and most relevant paper distribution system in the world. Today its algorithms make about 20 million paper recommendations a day.

<https://www.academia.edu>

## CrossAsia-Repository

CA SA SEA EA

CrossAsia-Repository is the full-text server of CrossAsia.org, the Specialised Information Service for Asian Studies, and provides an opportunity for publishing, indexing and long-term preservation of documents on Asian Studies. CrossAsia-Repository is a service of the University Library of Heidelberg, which within the scope of its special subject collection on Asian Studies offers members of the academic community worldwide the opportunity to publish their monographs, articles, lectures etc. in electronic format on the Internet at no charge.

<http://crossasia-repository.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>

## H-Net Asia

CA SA SEA EA

Part of H-Net Humanities and Social sciences online. The primary purpose of H-ASIA is to enable historians and other Asia scholars to easily communicate current research and teaching interests; to discuss new articles, books, papers, approaches, methods and tools of analysis; to test new ideas and share comments and tips on teaching. The site contains numerous articles, reviews, and an online database of resources on the Asian regions that can be found on the second link given here.

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-asia>  
<https://networks.h-net.org/node/22055/links>

## ResearchGate

A professional networking site for scientists and researchers. Share your publications, access millions more, and publish your data. Connect and collaborate with colleagues, peers, co-authors, and specialists. Get stats and find out who's been reading and citing your work. Ask questions, get answers, and solve research problems. Find the right job using the research-focused job board. Share updates about your current project, and keep up with the latest research.

<https://www.researchgate.net>

## Vietnam Studies Group SEA

The VSG website gives you access to a large collection of Vietnam studies related resources (books, journals, scholar directory, library collections, online guides, digital collections, and teaching materials). Significantly there is also a networking discussion board, which functions through an email list. The discussions are public, but you will have to join the group to participate.

<https://sites.google.com/a/uw.edu/vietnamstudiesgroup>

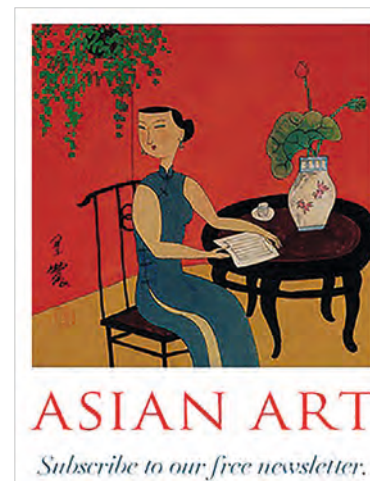
# News sites

## Asian Art Newspaper

CA SA SEA EA MENA

This website focuses on what is new in the world of Asian and Islamic art, including exhibitions, events, and auctions. It is free to subscribe to their newsletter. The Newspaper is available in both digital and print formats, for a small price.

<https://asianartnewspaper.com>



## BBC Asia CA SA SEA EA

The British Broadcasting Company is a long-established news broadcaster which is principally funded through the licence fee paid by households in the UK. BBC Asia is the platform for the BBC's news articles relating to Asia. The BBC also publishes their articles in most Asian languages, for example, BBC Telugu. The BBC operates a number of radio stations including BBC Asian Network, which is focused on British-South Asian lifestyles.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world/asia>  
[https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/live:bbc\\_asian\\_network](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/live:bbc_asian_network)

## The Caravan SA

The Caravan is India's first long-form narrative journalism magazine. It was relaunched in 2010 as a journal of politics and culture dedicated to meticulous reporting and the art of narrative. The stories are based on months of reporting and research, and are crafted into dramatic narratives that employ pace, colour, character and literary style. They bring the excitement and readability of great fiction to stories with real characters, real plots and real consequences. The magazine works with some of the finest reporters and writers in South Asia, and beyond, to tackle complex subjects at a depth which transcends that of the daily news. Articles are published in both English and Hindi; many can be accessed freely, but full access requires a subscription.

<https://caravanmagazine.in>

## Coconuts SEA EA

Coconuts is an alternative online publisher of news, culture and lifestyle commentary from Asia's cities. They also have a Youtube channel called Coconuts TV, which focuses on the "weird and wondrous untold stories of Asia".

<https://coconuts.co>

## Eurasianet CA

This is an independent news organization that covers news from and about the South Caucasus and Central Asia, providing on-the-ground reporting and critical perspectives on the most important developments in the region. Published in both English and Russian, Eurasianet strives to provide information useful to policymakers, scholars, and interested citizens both in and outside of Eurasia.

<https://eurasianet.org>

## JStor Daily

Occasionally Asia related, this interesting online publication contextualizes current events with scholarship by drawing on JSTOR's digital library academic journals, monographs, and other materials. The service also offers a number of newsletters.

<https://daily.jstor.org>



## New Mandala SEA

New Mandala is an academic blog that provides analysis and new perspectives on the societies and politics of Southeast Asia. New Mandala is hosted by the Australian National University's (ANU) Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs and is open to submissions from the academically orientated.

<https://www.newmandala.org>

## North Korea News EA

Every day, NK News gets you behind the headlines with analysis from some of the world's leading experts on North Korea, insight from both North Korean and defector voices, and opinions from academics, former residents and leading international observers. The site intends to bring authoritative news, opinion & analysis, research tools, data and subject specialists together in one convenient place. NK News also hosts a weekly podcast. Much of the site is freely accessible, but a subscription will give access to many more services.

<https://www.nknews.org>

## Prachatai SEA

Prachatai is an independent, non-profit, daily web newspaper established to provide reliable and relevant news and information to the Thai public, particularly with regard to human rights and Thai civil society. It has separate news sites in both English and Thai.

<https://prachatai.com/english>

## Radii EA

RADII (rā'dē-ī) is an independent platform of artists, writers and creators dedicated to sharing vibrant stories from the rarely

explored sides of new China. Founded in 2017, RADII creates multimedia content, events and interactive workshops that shine a light on the topics that connect the world's young global thinkers together. This website publishes opinion pieces, commentary, podcasts and video content on Chinese current affairs, society, art, and technology.

<https://radiichina.com>

**Radio Free Asia** SEA EA

Radio Free Asia's mission is to provide accurate and timely news and information to Asian countries whose governments prohibit access to a free press. RFA is a private, non-profit corporation, funded through an annual grant from the United States Agency for Global Media.

<https://www.rfa.org/english>



**Rice media** SEA EA

This website publishes alternative commentary and opinion pieces on culture, current affairs, food, travel and video content in contemporary Asia. Or in their own words: "Asia, Unfiltered. Rice is Asia's alternative voice. From sex workers to politicians, contemporary art to street food, we bring fresh perspectives and bold commentary on everyday life in Asia".

<https://www.ricemedia.co>

**Southeast Asia Globe** SEA

This website publishes daily in-depth feature articles on power, money, culture, art and the environment. Southeast Asia Globe is a space for some of the region's best writers and photographers to take readers behind the headlines and into the stories that shape people's lives. The site is dedicated to producing engaging stories that combine world-class journalism with captivating art design. The Globe has a number of newsletters you can subscribe to, and a selection of articles that are free to access, but the site funds itself through subscribers.

<https://southeastasiaglobe.com>

**SupChina** EA

"We help the west read China between the lines". SupChina is a New York-based news platform, that informs and connects a global audience regarding the business, technology, politics, culture, and society of China. SupChina publishes in a variety of mediums, organises large-scale events, and even hosts an extensive network of China-focused podcasts.

<https://supchina.com>



**New mandala: Duterte's Tight Grip over Local Politicians: Can It Endure?**

Weena Gera and Paul Hutchcroft, New Mandala, 19 Feb 2021.

The major trend in central-local relations in the Philippines under the regime of President Rodrigo Duterte has been the capacity of the presidential palace to exert a very tight grip over local politicians—arguably the tightest since the martial-law dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos (1972-1986). This trend has emerged even as Duterte has done strikingly little to advance the reforms that many local politicians have been keen to champion. He abandoned the federalism agenda which he had touted in the lead-up to his presidential campaign in 2016, and

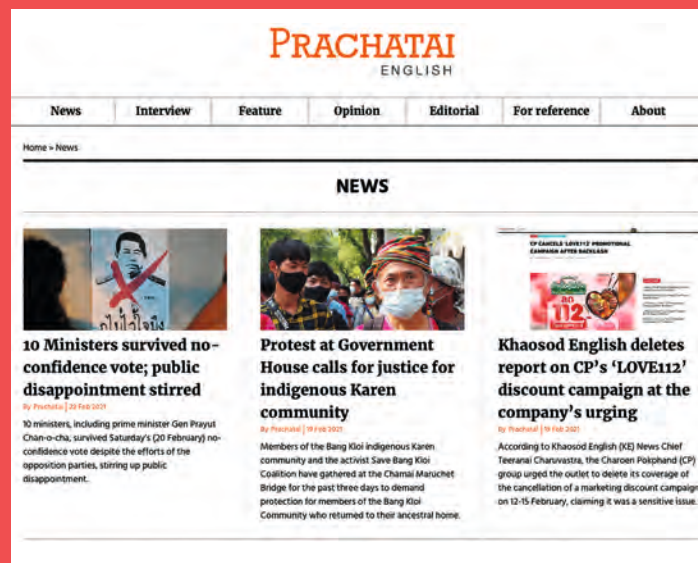
which had been eagerly supported by local government coalitions. In addition, the president backpedaled in delivering a financial windfall to local governments as promised in a landmark 2019 Supreme Court ruling on the primary national revenue sharing program. This decision, known as the Mandanas ruling, is the only major win for local politicians since Duterte came to power. Yet its implementation has been conveniently pushed out to the very end of his term in 2022.

If Duterte has failed to deliver, why do so many local politicians remain beholden to him? Read more at New Mandala:

<https://tinyurl.com/NewMandala-Duterte>

**Prachatai: Protest at Government House calls for justice for indigenous Karen community**

Article, 21 Feb 2021.



Members of the Bang Kloi indigenous Karen community and the activist Save Bang Kloi Coalition have gathered at the Chamai Maruchet Bridge for the past three days to demand protection for members of the Bang Kloi Community who returned to their ancestral home.

In early January 2021, 60-70 people from the Bang Kloi community travelled back to the former location of the Chai Phaen Din village, the community's ancestral home in the Kaeng Krachan forest. The community was forcibly evacuated from Chai Phaen Din in 1996, and for a second time in 2011, when park officials burned down their houses and rice storage barns.

At the time, the authorities promised the community that each family would be allocated 7 rai of land in Pong Luek-Bang Kloi village, where they were relocated. However, they were not allocated the promised amount of land, and the land they were given is not suitable for agriculture. The Covid-19 pandemic has also made their situation worse, as many community members who leave the village to work lost their income, leading to the decision to travel to Chai Phaen Din to live according to their traditional ways. Read full article at:

<https://prachatai.com/english/node/9077>

**Rice Media: Lessons from a circus performer about living with uncertainty**

Article by Rice Media contributor Priyashini Segar

As a circus performer, 24-year-old Jonathan comes face to face with risk on a daily basis. In striving to perfect stunts like fire spinning and aerial performances, he has realized two things about life: one can never block out uncertainty, and it actually is possible to even appreciate life's ambiguity.

These days, Jonathan adopts what he calls a "philosophical" view of life. To him, challenges and risks exist to show him that the path to growth is through accepting that nothing in life can be set in stone. It was the attitude he adopted as 2020 drew to a close, and as he enters a new year where unpredictability will continue to define many of his experiences. Read full article at Rice Media:

<https://tinyurl.com/ricemedia-circus>



# Open access blogs and journals

## Allegra Laboratory

"Anthropology for Radical Optimism". Allegra Laboratory is a platform for a large number of anthropologists and other academics to enliven the 'dead space' between standard academic publication and fast-moving public debates. Allegra seeks to provide its contributors with the chance to showcase their best critical thinking, replete with the originality of their own perspectives, on issues affecting the world today. As such, Allegra welcomes contributions in different formats that speak to pressing socio-political issues, broadly informed by the beauty of ethnography and the critical potential of anthropology.

<https://allegralaboratory.net>

## Asian Development Review

CA SA SEA EA

The Asian Development Review (ADR) is the journal of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), published by MIT Press. It publishes research on development issues relevant to the countries of the Asia and Pacific region. ADR is Open Access. All content is freely available in electronic format to readers across the globe.

<https://www.mitpressjournals.org/loi/adev>

## British Library Asia and Africa Studies Blog

CA SA SEA EA MENA

This blog site is written mostly by curators in Asia and African Studies (one of the 'subjects' at the British Library), but also includes contributions from guest contributors. The blog focuses on the collections in 'Asian and African Studies' that have their origins in the collections of the British Museum and in the Library of the East India Company and its successor, the India Office. Altogether more than 65,000 manuscripts and over 900,000 printed books cover over 500 languages or language groups, ranging from Chinese, spoken by one-third of the world's population, to languages of New Guinea spoken by only a few hundred people. Additionally, the Visual Arts collection is made up of about 250,000 photographs, 12,000 drawings by Indian artists, 16,000 drawings by European artists and a sizeable collection of paintings, sculpture, furniture and ephemera.

<https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/index.html>



Right: The Burning Kelin (Zhasau)/The Burning Daughter-in-law [Dowry] by Assel Kenzhetaeyva 'By reimagining the national dress, one artist shows what it really means to be a woman in modern Kazakhstan'.

## Cafe Dissensus SA

With a focus on Indian media, Cafe Dissensus (based in New York) is an alternative magazine dealing in art, culture, literature, and politics. The magazine also runs a blog, Cafe Dissensus Everyday.

"A very specific urge behind this magazine is to challenge the contemporary parochial attitude in Indian media. We want honest debate and discussion that should not be colored by any fear or favor. We are not a magazine for news reporting. We want to devote ourselves to analyzing issues that need to be discussed and debated."

<https://cafedissensus.com>

## The Calvert Journal CA

This journal was launched by the Calvert 22 Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation which focuses on contemporary art and culture of the New East (incorporating Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Russia). Today, the Journal is the world's leading publication for culture, innovation, photography and travel in the New East. In its daily features, news, photography and travel reports, The Calvert Journal stands apart for its wealth of original research, striking photography, and clarity of insight on a region that, despite its richness, often goes under-reported.

<https://www.calvertjournal.com>

## Chopsticks Alley SEA

This website focuses on the Vietnamese and Southeast Asian diasporas in the USA. The site hosts articles, podcast episodes and videos on contemporary culture, society, politics.

<https://www.chopsticksalley.com>

## Competing Regional Integrations in Southeast Asia (CRISEA) SEA

CRISEA is an interdisciplinary research project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Framework Programme that studies multiple forces affecting regional integration in Southeast Asia and the challenges they present to the peoples of Southeast Asia and its regional institutional framework, ASEAN. The five main topics of interest are the environment, the economy, the state, identity, and the region. Three transversal themes – migration, gender and security – are examined within each Work Package. Visit the site for an array of policy briefs, articles, working papers, and most interestingly: web documentaries.

<http://crisea.eu>

## The Calvert Journal: Assel Kenzhetaeyva

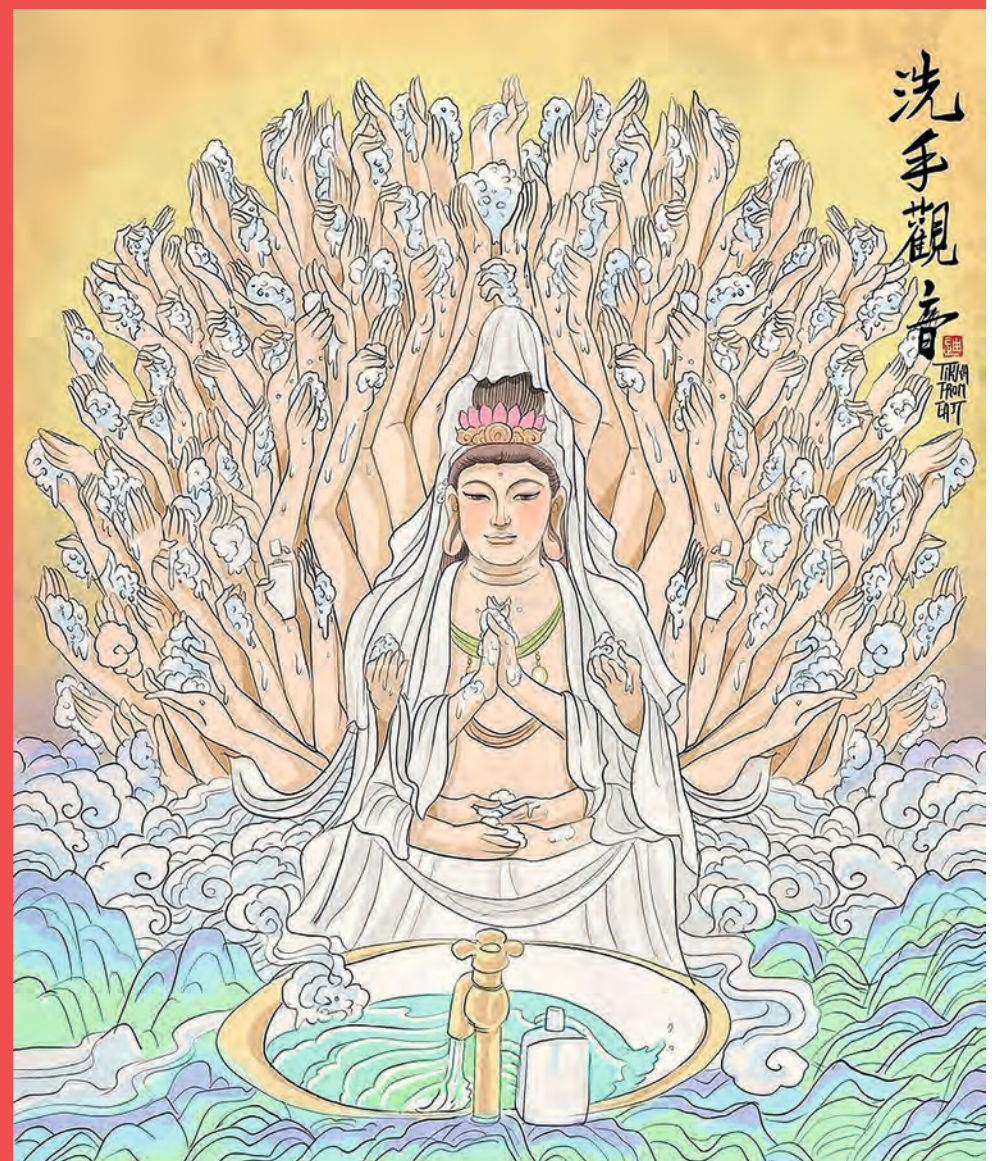
Post by Yuliya Khaimovich, The Calvert Journal, 25 January 2021.

Assel Kenzhetaeyva began her career as a fashion designer. Then, she became a mother, and began dedicating her practice to womanhood in all its complexity and diversity. "Art has always been around me," says Kenzhetaeyva, whose lineage includes opera singers, actors, and writers. "So, it was only natural that I pursued an artistic profession." But after giving birth to her first child in 2013, the new stage in life inspired her to pursue painting. "It was a period of emotional growth. I wasn't a little girl anymore," she says. Now working from her home in Almaty, Kenzhetaeyva's paintings depict women in costumes which combine elements of traditional Central Asian dress with modern clothing, including

national Kazakh jewellery, skirts with ethnic prints from around the region, delicate straps, and lace tights. Each garment acts as a symbol: despite having integrated certain Western norms into their lives, Kazakh women still carry the load of ancient traditions. Kenzhetaeyva's works speak to the strength and difficulties faced by women who take on many diverse responsibilities, dictated both by her traditional role as a mother but also by the modern ideal to be successful and good-looking. Or, to quote the phrase that accompanied one of her paintings at the UN Exhibition #Artivism for Gender Equality, "A woman rocks the cradle with one hand and rules the world with the other". Read the full article at:

<https://tinyurl.com/Calvert-Khaimovich>

Below: 'Washing-hands Guanyin' designed by Hong Kong artist Tik Ka from East. Image from the article 'Why Was Thousand-hand Guanyin Late for the Meeting? Implications of Religious Humour During COVID19', by Dean WANG, posted on CoronAsur, 18 June 2020. Read article at: <https://ari.nus.edu.sg/20331-19>







## Made in China: Doing time, making money in Angola

'Doing Time, Making Money at a Chinese State Firm in Angola', by Cheryl Mei-Ting Schmitz. 'Made in China', volume 5, issue 3 (Sept-Dec 2020).

In late 2013, I arrived in Luanda, the capital of Angola, for a year of research on the recent boom of Chinese investment and labour migration in the region. An acquaintance introduced me to Li Jun (pseudonym), a 27-year-old manager at a Chinese state-owned construction firm that I will call 'The Angola Company'. His company, like many others, had come to Angola in the early 2000s under the auspices of the massive National Reconstruction Program established at the end of the 27-year-long Angolan civil war. The Angolan Government contracted Chinese companies to build infrastructure, paying for the projects with loans from Chinese financial institutions backed by Angolan oil. The arrangement was

criticised by suspicious observers as a form of 'new imperialism', while Chinese and Angolan state actors praised it as a pragmatic and mutually advantageous partnership.

As an ethnographer, I was less interested in casting moral judgement about 'China in Africa' than in understanding how China-Africa relations were experienced through everyday life. At one of our first meetings, I relayed this vague anthropological goal to manager Li. I wondered whether I might conduct participant observation at his company's base, which consisted of dormitories and offices built on the corner of a construction site. His response surprised me. 'I understand. You want to know not only how Chinese people work here, but also how they live. But,' he cautioned, 'you should know one thing: Chinese people do not live in Angola; we only work.' Read full article at:

<https://tinyurl.com/madeinchina-Schmitz>

## QueerAsia: What is 'Queer' in Korean?

'Queer'가 한국말로 뭐예요? (What is 'Queer' in Korean?): Reflections on Navigating as Queer-identifying Student Activist, by Jessie Yoon. Part of the 'Queer' Asia 2020: Rethinking Radical Now Blog Series - Our blog series in lieu of cancelled conference activities in 2020

How does the concept 퀴어 (queer) operate as a part of everyday life, when mainstream conception is based upon the controversial Seoul pride? How are my experiences of using this word academically in universities entangled with, and distance itself from this popular reception? So, it's story time: I'd like tell you three brief tales to sketch my experience as a queer student activist. In their differences, I explore the radical potential of the term 'queer' in South Korean context. Across these three stories of mine, one question never stopped haunting me. "What is 퀴어?" Read the full article at:

<https://tinyurl.com/QueerAsia-Yoon>



## CoronAsur SA SEA EA

This is a research blog hosted by the Religion and Globalisation Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Grounded in Asia, with a global and comparative outlook, Religion and COVID-19 curate reflections, analysis, opinions, commentary pieces, photographic essays and multimedia contributions written by scholars and practitioners at the interface of the COVID-19 pandemic, religious communities and their ritual practices.

<https://ari.nus.edu.sg/coronasur-home>

## The Hatha Yoga Project SA

South Asia focused, hosted by SOAS, this research project addresses the history of Yoga. The site contains access to a number of publications, a page devoted to resources on the topic and a blog.

<http://hyp.soas.ac.uk>

## Himalaya: The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies SA EA

HIMALAYA is a biannual, open access, peer-reviewed journal published by the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies. On this website you can access the journal and its archive of articles.

<https://himalayajournal.org>

## History of Science in South Asia Journal SA

The History of Science in South Asia Journal, hosted by the University of Alberta, publishes the latest international research in the history of science in South Asia. The journal provides open access to all its content via the website.

<https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/hssa/index.php/hssa/index>

## Life as Art Asia SEA

This is a blog about art and artists based in Bali & Indonesia.

<https://lifeasartasia.art>

## Made in China EA

The Made in China initiative rests on two pillars: the conviction that today more than ever it is necessary to bridge the gap between the scholarly community and the general public, and the related belief that open access is necessary to ethically reappropriate academic research from commercial publishers who restrict the free circulation of ideas. Starting as a monthly newsletter in Italian aiming to spread awareness of the complexities and nuances underpinning socioeconomic change in contemporary Chinese society, Made in China progressed into a quarterly journal with a specific focus on Chinese labour and civil society in English language. From that point on, the project quickly developed in previously unforeseen directions, including not only the journal, but also book series, summer schools, and other events. The Made in China journal that you see today is published in partnership with ANU Press and is freely accessible online.

<https://madeinchinajournal.com>

## Modern Yoga Research SA

This website is focused on modern yoga and is a great resource for finding established and current research into modern yoga and, more generally, about some of the most informative research on earlier forms of yoga. The website hosts a podcast, and provides access to a number of articles on the topic.

<http://www.modernyogaresearch.org>

## QueerAsia SEA SA EA

'Queer' Asia is a collective of early career researchers, doctoral researchers, and activists, currently housed at SOAS, University of London. Their work to create a global

platform for queer activists, artists, and academics is done in an entirely voluntary capacity. They strive to build a global platform from which to challenge dominant ideas, forms, and representations of gender and sexuality. The platform also has a YouTube channel.

<https://queerasia.com>

## Roadwork Asia CA EA

Research project conducting ethnographic fieldwork along roads that have been designated as key links at the Sino-Inner Asian interface of the China-initiated Silk Road Economic Belt. The site tracks the project's research, events, publications, social media and even an online exhibition. The team has also been maintaining a personal blog (Viral Infrastructure) during the pandemic with their thoughts and feelings: "As anthropologists of infrastructure, we turn our gaze to infra-structures and objects in the time of COVID-19. To empty park benches, closed borders and refrigerators exploding with their contents. To letterboxes, face masks, bottles of disinfectant, but also tractors, aeroplanes, television screens, balconies, camper vans and credit cards. Confined to our home offices in countries under lockdown, we write, in a freestyle manner, about these silent participants in our lives. And we marvel at how far humans can be called Homo infrastructuralis".

<https://roadworkasia.com>

## Sarai, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies SA

Over the last two decades, the Sarai programme at CSDS has arguably been South Asia's most prominent and productive platform for research and reflection on the transformation of urban space and contemporary realities, especially with regard to cities, data and information, law, and media infrastructures. The website includes research on urbanity, media, and law and gives access to a number of their publications and essays.

<https://sarai.net>

## Servants' Pasts SA

The blog focuses on the history of domestic servants and service in South Asia. The project 'Domestic Servants in Colonial South Asia' (DOS), which ran from 2015-2018, is an attempt at two levels: one, to write the history of the servant-subaltern, which is almost marginal in South Asian accounts, and second, through the history of servants rewrite the social, cultural and labour histories of South Asia. The project's temporal scope is from the mid-eighteenth to mid-twentieth century.

<https://servantspasts.wordpress.com>

## The South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal (SAMAJ) SA

This website is a double-blind peer-reviewed, open access, journal devoted to research in the social sciences and humanities on South Asia.

<https://journals.openedition.org/samaj>



## South Asian American Digital Archive SA

This archive is specifically focused on the history of South Asian Americans and includes 4,154 items ranging from journals, photographs to periodicals. The site allows you to search by topic, time, languages and states.

<https://www.saada.org>

# Podcasts

## The Asian Review of Books Podcast [CA](#) [SA](#) [SEA](#) [EA](#) [MENA](#)

The Asian Review of Books has an archive of more than two thousand book reviews. The ARB also features long-format essays by leading Asian writers and thinkers, excerpts from newly-published books and reviews of arts and culture. It provides an unparalleled forum for discussion of key contemporary issues by Asians for Asia and a vehicle of intellectual depth and breadth where leading thinkers can write on the books, arts and ideas of the day. The site also hosts a weekly podcast featuring interviews with authors.

<https://asianreviewofbooks.com/content/category/podcast>

## The Belt and Road Podcast [CA](#) [SA](#) [SEA](#) [EA](#)

This is a highly informative podcast by Erik Myxter-iino and Juliet Lu. The podcast gives insight into various BRI projects from an 'on the ground' perspective, providing plenty of ethnographic details.

<https://www.buzzsprout.com/196316>



## The China in Africa Podcast by SupChina [EA](#)

This podcast is "A weekly discussion about China's engagement across Africa hosted by journalist Eric Olander in Hanoi and Asia-Africa scholar Cobus van Staden in Johannesburg". If you are interested in learning more about China's investment in Africa and about the newest developments in China-Africa relations. It provides interesting perspectives on China's presence in Africa.

<https://supchina.com/series/the-china-in-africa-podcast>

## Jaipur Literature Festival [SA](#)

The Jaipur Literature Festival is a flagship event of Teamwork Arts, which produces over 25 highly performing arts, visual arts and literary festivals across more than 40 cities globally. Every year, the Festival brings together a diverse mix of the world's greatest writers, thinkers, humanitarians, politicians, business leaders, sports people and entertainers on one stage to champion the freedom to express and engage in thoughtful debate and dialogue. Described as the 'greatest literary show on Earth', the Jaipur Literature Festival is a sumptuous feast of ideas. The Jaipur Bytes podcast delivers thought-provoking ideas and meaningful

debates from the iconic Jaipur Literature Festival, setting off conversations even when away from the Pink City. Their website hosts a number of South Asia related podcast episodes and they have a YouTube channel where you can watch past events and talks.

<https://jflitfest.org>  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/JprLitFest>



## Majlis Podcast [CA](#)

This podcast is hosted by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Central Asia Report. It hosts renowned speakers and experts of the region who discuss the most pressing topics of Central Asia.

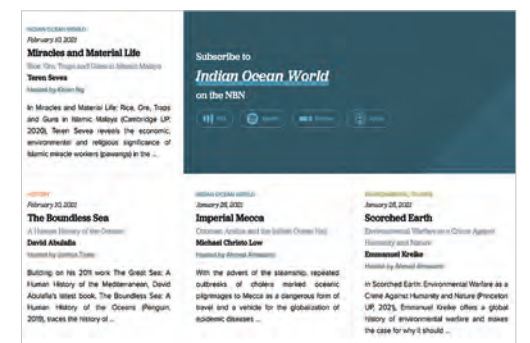
<https://www.rferl.org/majlis-talking-asia-podcast>

## New Books Network

[CA](#) [SA](#) [SEA](#) [EA](#) [MENA](#)

This is a podcast network for books, which you can search according to a number of topics and/or regions, such as South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Korea, Central Asia, Indian Ocean World, Chinese, Asian-USA, etc. There is also a section called Asian Review of Books. The podcasts are available on their website but also on Spotify, Stitcher, and Apple podcasts. The network also accepts pitches if you have a book to discuss.

<https://newbooksnetwork.com>



## The China in Africa Podcast: 'China and the geopolitics of COVID-19 vaccines in Africa'

Published 15 February 2021

COVID-19 vaccines are finally starting to make their way to the world's poorest countries as production of Chinese, Russian, and Indian jobs ramps up. But it's the large-scale distribution of Chinese vaccines that's causing a lot of people around the world, particularly in the U.S. and European countries, to become increasingly worried about the geopolitical ramifications.

In Africa, the Chinese have exported vaccines to half a dozen countries and are in talks with dozens more to make

jobs available in the coming months. Similarly, a new air bridge between the two regions, to facilitate the transportation and distribution of vaccines throughout Africa, is now operational.

Nwachukwu Egbunike, the sub-Saharan community manager for the independent journalism website Global Voices, says the West isn't in a good position to complain about China's 'vaccine diplomacy' given how little it's doing to help the situation. Nwachukwu joins Eric and Cobus to discuss a two-part series he wrote on the geopolitical ramifications of COVID-19 vaccine distribution for China, Africa, and Western countries.



## The Asian Review of Books Podcast: Three Asian Divas

ARB podcast with David Chaffetz, author of "Three Asian Divas: Women, Art and Culture in Shiraz, Delhi and Yangzhou"

The 'diva' is a common trope when we talk about culture. We normally think of the diva as a Western construction: the opera singer, the Broadway actress, the movie star. A woman of outstanding talent, whose personality and ability are both larger-than-life.

But the truth is that throughout history, many cultures have featured spaces for strong female artists, whose talent allows

them to break free of the gender roles that pervaded their societies. In "Three Asian Divas: Women, Art and Culture in Shiraz, Delhi and Yangzhou", David Chaffetz briefly explores how these 'Asian divas' could be seen as some of the first recognizably 'modern women'. Read more and listen to this podcast at:

<https://tinyurl.com/ARB-Chaffetz>

Above: Gauhar Jân (1873-1930) was an Indian singer and dancer from Kolkata. She was one of the first performers to record music on 78 rpm records in India.

## The China in Africa Podcast

Share this podcast



THE CHINA IN AFRICA PODCAST

### China and the geopolitics of COVID-19 vaccines in Africa

COVID-19 vaccines are finally starting to make their way to the world's poorest countries as production of Chinese, Russian, and Indian jobs ramps up. But...



THE CHINA IN AFRICA PODCAST

### Tanzania's relationship status with China: It's complicated

The January visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Tanzania highlighted the East African country's growing importance to Beijing. It's a



THE CHINA IN AFRICA PODCAST

### China wants to become a major player in international aid

In January, China published a blueprint for how it plans to become one of the world's leading countries in international aid and development.



THE CHINA IN AFRICA PODCAST

### China's rapidly evolving relations in the DR Congo

Foreign Minister Wang Yi's stopover in Kinshasa on Jan. 14, 2021, highlights the growing importance of the Democratic Republic of the

### Most Read in The China in Africa Podcast

China and the geopolitics of COVID-19 vaccines in Africa  
Eric Olander and Cobus van Staden

Tanzania's relationship status with China: It's complicated  
Eric Olander and Cobus van Staden

China wants to become a major player in international aid  
Eric Olander and Cobus van Staden

# Social media and listservs

## Asian Feminist

CA SA SEA EA MENA

A curated collection of the latest publications and news on sexuality and gender in Asia.

<https://www.facebook.com/TheAsianFeminist>



## Chinese Storytellers EA

China-USA journalists and writers keeping you up to date on the latest news stories.

<https://twitter.com/CNStorytellers>



## French Colonial History Society SEA

A private Facebook group, which offers a discussion space for French colonial history.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1627205484163791>



## Indian Ocean Studies listserv SA

This list is primarily aimed at those involved in Indian Ocean Studies in the humanities and the social sciences. This does not exclude researchers from other disciplines, however, and all with an interest in the Indian Ocean are welcome to join. Subscribe here:

<https://tinyurl.com/IOSlistservSubscribe>

## International Institute for Asian Studies

CA SA SEA EA

Keep up-to-date on the latest editions of the Newsletter, the latest publications, online events, calls for papers and news from IIAS! On the IIAS Youtube channel you can find recordings of webinars and conferences as well as updates about ICAS (International Conference for Asia Scholars).

<https://www.facebook.com/asianstudies>  
<https://twitter.com/AsianStudies>  
<https://www.youtube.com/AsianStudies>



## Raphael Rashid EA

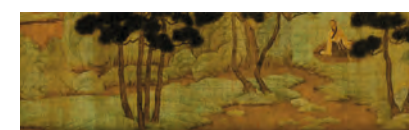
Korean and English Language journalist with a focus on Korean news.

<https://twitter.com/koryodynasty>

## Sinologists EA

The Sinologists Facebook group is a professional, scholarly community, and membership is open to all scholars and professionals working in Chinese studies.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/sinologists/about>



Sinologists  
Private group · 355 members

## South Asian Studies Group SA

A large private group, useful for finding online lectures and latest books on SA, particularly from researchers based in SA.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/southasianstudies>

# Webinars and MOOCS

## Berkeley 2020 Conference on Post-Imperial Oceanics SA

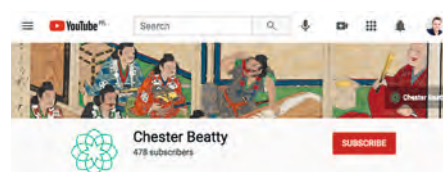
Catch up on lectures from this 2-day virtual conference. The conference focused on the fragmented, layered and linked oceanic imperial processes, to think with the creative tensions between sociocultural processes across oceanic surfaces, and the mysteries of the submarine.

<https://southasia.berkeley.edu/pio-videos>

## Chester Beatty Museum SA SEA

Talks, audio tours, webinars, workshops and activities.

<https://www.youtube.com/ChesterBeattyDublin>

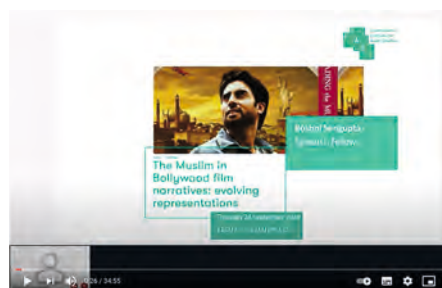


## IIAS Webinars

CA SA SEA EA

The International Institute for Asian Studies hosts a series of Webinars and other events.

<https://www.ias.asia/events>  
<https://www.youtube.com/AsianStudies>



## King's India Institute Seminar Series SA

The India Institute, King's College London, runs regular seminars on topics relating to India and its global impact, including guest speakers, book launches, and film screenings. Seminars will be held fortnightly on Thursdays from 12:00-13.30, online until further notice.

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/events/series/kings-india-institute-seminar-series>

## Mouse and Manuscript

CA MENA

This website hosts lessons in codicology and palaeography based on manuscripts from the Middle East, Islamic Africa and Asia. Lessons are based on manuscripts held predominantly by Leiden university. The project is the initiative of Dorrit van Dalen and Peter Webb, but includes other contributors with backgrounds in manuscript traditions.

<https://mouse.digitalscholarship.nl/lessons>

## Politics East Asia EA

Whether you are an academic, student, policy-maker, journalist, or East Asia enthusiast, this website and blog aims to help you get your bearings in the complex and often challenging field of East Asian politics. This site includes useful introductions to methods of online research orientated to East Asia, aimed at undergraduate students, but also includes articles on issues relating to digital East Asia, curated by Leiden university lecturer Florian Schneider.

<http://www.politicseastasia.com>



## SASNET SA

Swedish South Asian Studies Network at Lund University - with a newsletter, podcasts and webinars.

<https://www.sasnet.lu.se>  
<https://www.youtube.com/SASNETLundUniversity>  
<https://soundcloud.com/sasnetlund>



## TU Delft SA SEA EA

An array of online courses, including Asia-related subjects.

<https://online-learning.tudelft.nl/courses>

# Preserving manuscripts for future generations

The digital repository of endangered and affected manuscripts in Southeast Asia (DREAMSEA)

Below: Mrs Wiwin Indarti, S.S. M.Hum. with Mbah Haliyah in Banyuwangi at the tip of East Java, Indonesia; returning one of his manuscripts after digitisation. Photograph DREAMSEA.

Dick van der Meij and Jan van der Putten



In Southeast Asia a large number of handwritten manuscripts abound that contain a wide array of, mostly, religious subjects and that are written in a large variety of languages and scripts. A substantial number of these manuscripts have been preserved in public collections inside and outside Southeast Asia, but a surprisingly large amount of these culturally significant objects are in private hands or stored in semi-public collections of institutions, such as palaces, temples and other places of religious study and worship in the region. Deliberate or unintended neglect, climate, natural disasters and more, put an increasing number of manuscripts in jeopardy. The DREAMSEA programme was set up to ensure that the contents of the manuscripts are preserved for present and future generations.

## Lost forever

In the largest country in Southeast Asia, Indonesia, the number of manuscripts in private collections alone is staggering. They may be found from Aceh on the tip of Sumatra all the way east to Papua, and from the Minahassa in the north to the royal palaces of Central Java. In mainland Southeast Asia manuscript lovers and guardians of temples have established repositories to store their highly valued and often venerated heirlooms. There is a network of Buddhist convents built around Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia, that include small pavilions where the sacred texts are kept. The manuscript cultures in the region, with the practice of copying texts by hand, continued most pertinently in the religious culture, whereas the more secular parts of social life were informed with texts that were much less involved in rituals and could be multiplied and preserved in other ways. We encounter similar trends in insular Southeast Asia where small Islamic educational centres frequently have their repositories. At the same time, Balinese temples, Chinese shrines and Christian institutions will have retained some of their cultural heritage of handwritten documents.

Many of these manuscripts are not preserved in a professional way, which

means that they are often the victim of simple unintended neglect. The humid tropical weather conditions we encounter in large parts of the region are detrimental for the preservation of manuscripts, especially when they are written on paper. Insects and other pests, too, have that effect as these animals feed on the organic materials. Natural and social disasters further add to the circumstances that make handwritten manuscripts in Southeast Asia highly endangered, and put their physical existence in jeopardy.

The manuscripts frequently remain the only witnesses of a substantial number of texts that are still unedited and therefore unknown in any other form. This means that when the manuscripts disappear or are destroyed, their contents are lost forever, not only for scholars but also for the general interested public. The loss of these texts means that part of the diversity in the cultural and religious outlook of the peoples in the region will disappear with them. Within the religious and cultural traditions there is a tendency for small groups, with their own exegetic practices, to be regarded as deviant by the majorities who are informed by the transnational mainstream religious practices that are considered to be in agreement with 'modern times'.

## Digitisation, metadata and preservation

The DREAMSEA programme was set up against the background of the ongoing degradation of cultural diversity and has the aim to ensure that the contents of the manuscripts are preserved for present and future generations. We have embarked on an ambitious course comprising the digitisation of as many endangered manuscripts as possible. It will involve storing these surrogate images on servers and converting them to other formats in the future. We will then upload these images to an open-access database, providing reliable metadata about the manuscripts to assist users of the database to form an impression of the physical manuscripts and supply information for their research. Although not included as one of our main aims, we also develop efforts to preserve the physical manuscripts by advising their owners about better ways to store and handle them. DREAMSEA has its regional office at the premises of the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) of the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta. The programme is executed through a cooperation between the Centre for the Study of Manuscripts Cultures (CSMC) at the

University of Hamburg in Germany, PPIM, and the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML), which is based in Minnesota, USA. The programme is funded by a generous grant from the Arcadia Foundation in the United Kingdom.

The fact that Southeast Asian manuscripts were written using a large variety of scripts and languages makes the execution of the programme quite challenging. One of the most complex issues is the metadata, which needs to be accurate and correct. To execute this in a satisfactory manner, we call in the help of experts who are informed and/or part of the manuscript traditions themselves to write down and check the information about the physical characteristics of the manuscript and the text(s) contained in them. In Indonesia, DREAMSEA works together with members of the Indonesian Association for Nusantara Manuscripts (MANASSA, *Masyarakat Pernaskahan Nusantara*); they live all over the country and use their networks of manuscript owners and enthusiasts to help us detect and negotiate access to endangered collections in private hands. In mainland Southeast Asia, this kind of network does not exist, and DREAMSEA relies on help from academics and other groups of manuscript experts. DREAMSEA also cooperates with



Right: A so-called 'buk' in Indramayu on Java's north coast. In this region, old manuscripts are not destroyed but put in a bag. The bag is used during ceremonies, but is never opened, so no one knows its contents. DREAMSEA was allowed to have one 'buk' opened to digitise its contents, as far as possible. Photograph DREAMSEA.



Below: DREAMSEA staff digitising a paper manuscript in Surau Simaung, West Sumatra, Indonesia, on 9 September 2019. Photograph DREAMSEA.



Above: Returning manuscripts to the Vat Pak Chaek village temple monastery, by the abbot, novices and lay people from the Pak Chaek village community and the DREAMSEA team of Luang Prabang, Laos, on 9 January 2020. Photograph by Bounsou Saytham.

the National Library of Indonesia staff to assist manuscript owners with improved preservation methods for their collections.

In a nutshell, the DREAMSEA proactive procedure is as follows. DREAMSEA or MANASSA staff members approach manuscript owners, or they contact DREAMSEA or MANASSA themselves. After this initial step, manuscript owners or MANASSA members may submit a proposal to the DREAMSEA office in Jakarta for the digitisation of their manuscripts. The proposal is assessed and, if approved, a mission is sent to the owner to photograph the manuscripts. A team usually consists of 5 persons: one photographer, one assistant photographer, an academic expert, and assistant academic expert and an assistant. Where necessary, manuscripts are cleaned before being photographed. The cleaning of the manuscripts needs to be done very carefully so as not to damage them even more. They are written on a large variety of materials ranging from different types of paper, palm-leaf, bamboo and tree bark. These writing supports come in all kinds of sizes, from extremely small to large scrolls of many meters long. To ensure that the team records crucial information about the manuscript themselves, the place where they are kept, their owners,

and how they were used and transmitted, a special photographer cum videographer is part of the team. The information gathered is used to form a picture of the present manuscript situation, which is used to design a strategy to help owners better preserve their manuscripts. At various stages during the process, the metadata and manuscript images are checked for quality. The metadata is translated into English and, along with the images, is sent to HMML in Minnesota to be uploaded to the DREAMSEA cloud. This quality control is complex and very time consuming because of the large number of languages and scripts that need to be deciphered and, of course, due to the enormous diversity of manuscript contents. We regularly encounter incomplete manuscripts, often with missing pages at the start, which makes it very difficult to quickly identify texts contained in the manuscripts. Particularly in the case of the quite common Multiple-Text Manuscripts (MTMs), i.e., manuscripts containing a variety of (fragments of) texts, the identification of the items can be a very time-consuming effort. Frequently, the texts in the manuscripts are without title, and the DREAMSEA staff has to provide one, so that researchers at least get an idea of what type of text it is. As a matter of course, these

provisional titles may be inaccurate, and other mishaps can also occur. Therefore, we invite researchers and other interested parties who find mistakes in the online repository to report such inaccuracies, so that we can improve the catalogue. So far manuscripts have been digitised from Luang Prabang in Laos, Lamphun in Thailand and in many places in Indonesia in Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi and Bali. At present, more than 150.000 images have been processed, of which more than 27.000 are now available in the DREAMSEA Cloud.

### Cultural heritage and diversity

Texts in Southeast Asian manuscripts have lost much of their initial practical value and relevance for everyday life, and much information can be gathered from books and, of course, from the internet; yet, as mentioned above, a substantial number of texts have never been edited nor have they appeared in book form, and therefore may reveal hidden treasures that add to the knowledge we have of the past. The manuscripts that act as containers of the texts can tell us much about how texts went from one place to the other and reveal the intercultural, interreligious and interhuman contacts throughout the region in the (recent) past, and sometimes even in the present since some manuscript cultures are continued. We should not forget that the majority of the manuscripts in the region were made recently and many, if not most of them, are no older than 100 to 150 years. This means that until recently, the contents of these manuscripts were disseminated in manuscript form only. This adds to their value as no other sources are available to tell us what people thought and how they expressed their thoughts in words. Manuscripts also feature prominently in the discovery and revived appraisal of nations' cultural heritage, but perhaps particularly of specific individual small communities. They are often used as heirlooms of a community's highly cultured past, that is almost forgotten but is worthy of being preserved and restored.

In its attempts to preserve this cultural heritage and diversity throughout Southeast Asia, DREAMSEA endeavours to find as many manuscripts from as many different backgrounds as possible. This is easier said than done. Not infrequently, people are ignorant about their content and value, or they are embarrassed or secretive about their existence out of fear of ridicule, or even physical threat because others believe the manuscripts contain deviant texts. In each case, we will need to assess whether the manuscripts brought to our attention are indeed endangered. It transpires that most manuscripts brought to us are threatened simply because of the tropical climate and the fact that they are in the hands of people who do not know how to preserve them professionally. The fact alone that they are in private hands is another reason for their endangeredness. Once the collector dies or decides to get rid of his collection, the manuscripts are either lost or end up in private collections that may not be accessible. This fact presented yet another dilemma for us. We had to consider whether to digitise entire collections or only certain parts of them. We solved this issue in a rather practical and straightforward way. Choosing only selected manuscripts would mean that our present-day interests would decide not to include what others in the future might deem to be of crucial importance. Therefore, we decided to digitise entire collections.

The digitised manuscripts stay with their owners. As a token of appreciation of their willingness to have their collections digitised and for the very fact that they built these collections, they receive a framed certificate with a picture of one of the manuscripts. They also receive a hard disk with the digital images of their manuscripts, and sometimes we present them with cupboards or boxes to store the collection in a dust-free environment.

### Stay informed

Building on a community of stakeholders and a network of informants is crucial to finding the smaller collections of manuscripts and to showing how much fun studying these manuscripts may be. DREAMSEA uses social media to inform the public what is being done and to attract attention for the study and use of handwritten manuscripts. You can connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, whilst more about current and future activities can also be found on the DREAMSEA website.

Dick van der Meij, DREAMSEA's Academic Advisor and Liaison Officer  
[dreamsea.mss@gmail.com](mailto:dreamsea.mss@gmail.com)

Jan van der Putten, Professor Austronesistik, Universität Hamburg, Primary Investigator (PI) DREAMSEA  
[Jan.van.der.Putten@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:Jan.van.der.Putten@uni-hamburg.de)

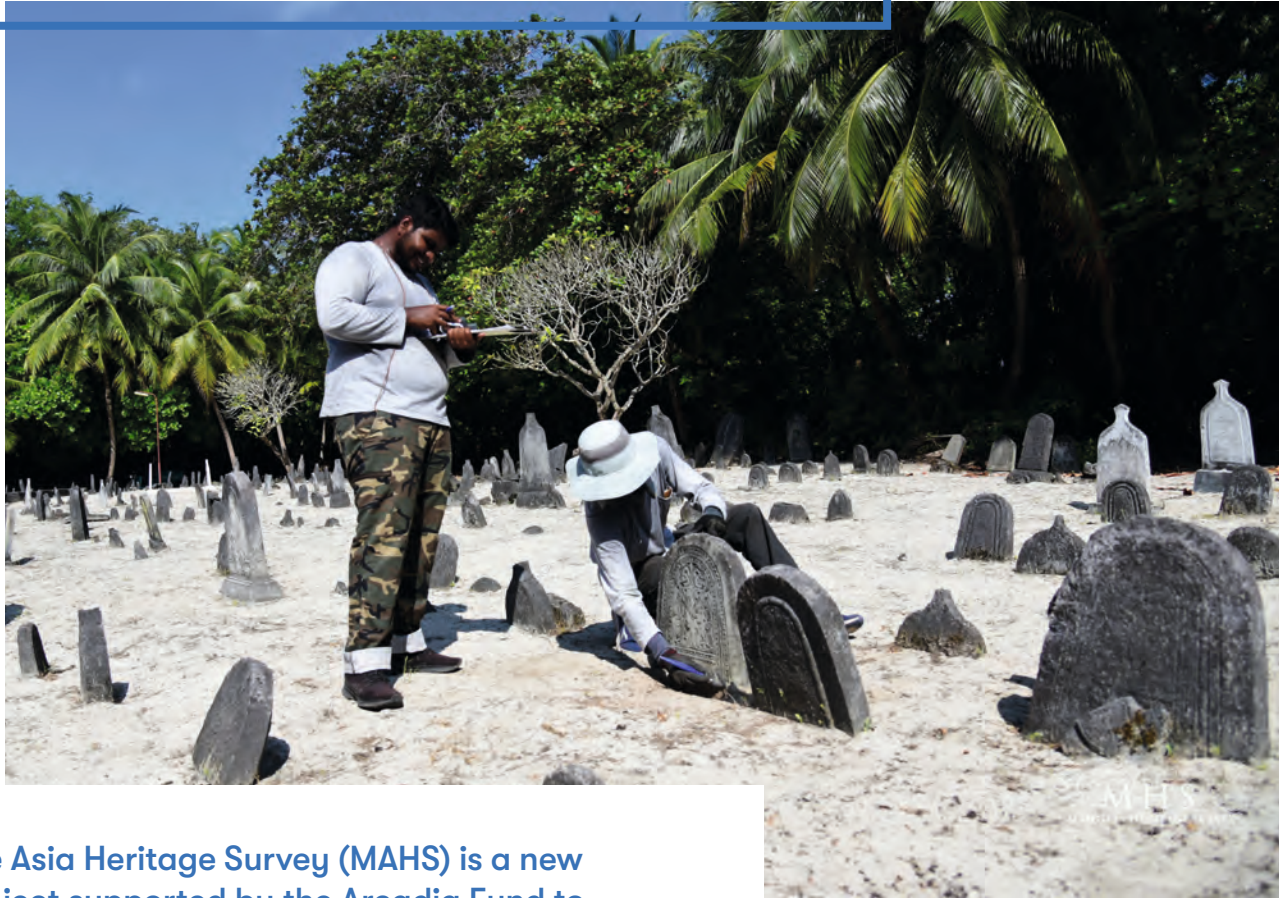


Left: Dramatic storing conditions in Indonesia raise the question if digitising is feasible at all. Collection of La Ode Zaenu, Bau-Bau, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. 25 August 2018. Photograph DREAMSEA.

DREAMSEA  
 Website: <https://dreamsea.co>  
 Blog: <http://blog.dreamsea.co>  
 Repository: <https://www.hmmlcloud.org/dreamsea/manuscripts.php>  
 Instagram: @dreamsea\_mss (#saveourmanuscripts)  
 Twitter: @dreamsea\_mss (#saveourmanuscripts)  
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/dreamseaproject>  
 YouTube: DREAMSEA Manuscripts

# The Maritime Asia Heritage Survey

R. Michael Feener,  
Patrick Daly and  
Noboru Ishikawa



Below: The MAHS field team documenting coral-stone grave markers at an old Muslim cemetery on HA. Mulhadhoo in the Maldives.

The Maritime Asia Heritage Survey (MAHS) is a new five-year project supported by the Arcadia Fund to identify and document vulnerable heritage resources across maritime Southern Asia within an open-access and permanently preserved digital archive. The MAHS Project is a partnership between the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) at Kyoto University, the Earth Observatory of Singapore (EOS) at Nanyang Technological University, and national-level institutions in each of the countries where we work.

The seasonal monsoon cycles of maritime Southern Asia have facilitated the circulation of people, materials, and ideas across a vast seascape over the past two millennia. The history of the region has been shaped by historically inter-connected societies stretching from the deserts of the Middle East and Indian sub-continent, to the jungles of island Southeast Asia and port cities along the Chinese coast. Complex maritime circulations of commerce and cultures created dynamics in which trans-regional cultural and religious traditions merged with unique local forms of expression, producing diverse forms of material culture. The history of the region has also been shaped by complex and often volatile environmental conditions, in which natural hazards have long posed significant challenges for peoples and polities across the region. Today, these same environmental pressures, coupled with the accelerating impacts of global climate change, pose potentially insurmountable challenges to the survival of the rich cultural heritage situated along Southern Asia's coasts, deltas, and archipelagoes. The Maritime Asia Heritage Survey is a new multi-national effort, supported by the Arcadia Fund (a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin), to document critically endangered cultural heritage in this region.

## Trans-regional cultural dynamics

Governments and donors have invested significant resources to preserve and document aspects of Asia's tangible,

intangible, and natural heritage. However, this work tends to favor sites that are boldly monumental, play important roles within national tourist economies, and/or fit within contemporary national (or nationalistic) narratives. This can be seen, for example, in the attention to large sites such as Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Borobudur in Indonesia and Hue City in Vietnam. Less attention has been allocated to document and preserve heritage sites of more modest scale that reflect the diverse experiences of local communities across this interconnected region.

The history of maritime interactions across much of Southern Asia is a history of sojourners and migrants that often complicates religious or ethno-nationalist heritage narratives and is thus often neglected or downplayed within the region. The heritage sites that reflect this are, moreover, difficult to preserve, manage, and study because of the inherent geographic decentralization across the borders of modern nation-states. Any effort to preserve this maritime heritage thus requires a multi-national scope and a range of local partnerships to engage with the material legacy of the trans-regional cultural dynamics produced by a constant stream of maritime interactions over the history of the region.

By definition, maritime sites are generally located in low-lying coastal areas and on deltas that are highly vulnerable to a combination of natural hazards, subsidence, and climate change. Major tsunamis, cyclones, floods, and earthquakes have devastated communities across maritime Asia. This has also resulted in extensive damage to cultural heritage – as we have extensively documented in parts of Indonesia hit by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.<sup>1</sup> Major river deltas in Asia are

rapidly eroding, and coastal urban areas are literally sinking as groundwater is depleted. It is estimated that climate change will increase sea-levels by between 1 and 3 meters by the end of this century, potentially inundating tens of thousands of square km, displacing millions of people, and further eroding the region's endangered cultural heritage.

To make matters worse, heritage sites in many parts of Asia are under immense pressure from rapid and largely unplanned development and urbanization. Historic neighborhoods have been razed or fundamentally altered to accommodate urbanization, while a wide slate of intangible cultural heritage and traditional practices are jeopardized by the rush to modernize. Finally, the rise of political, ethnic, and religious extremism has led to the desecration of heritage that belongs to a number of cultural communities that comprise minorities within the borders of modern nation-states. If the cultural heritage sites of these regions are not documented soon, they may be lost forever, along with the incalculable knowledge about the histories they embody.

## Documenting vulnerable heritage resources

The Maritime Asia Heritage Survey (MAHS) is a new five-year project supported by the Arcadia Fund to identify and document vulnerable heritage resources across maritime Southern Asia within an open-access and permanently preserved digital archive. The MAHS Project is a partnership between the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) at Kyoto University, the Earth Observatory of Singapore (EOS) at Nanyang Technological University, and national-level institutions in Indonesia, Brunei, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives.

We are focusing on these five countries because together they present a rich inter-linked history of complex cultural circulations that are reflected in heritage sites vulnerable to a combination of environmental and human threats. The Maldives is a former Buddhist society that has over the past millennium become thoroughly Islamicized. Sri Lanka is predominantly Buddhist but still a remarkably diverse society including historically

significant populations of Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Brunei presents a concentrated case study of a rich local heritage formed out of centuries of interaction between Chinese, Malay Muslim, and indigenous populations, while Vietnam provides the survey with coverage of a remarkable heritage of Cham Hinduism alongside rich histories of localized expressions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity. Indonesia has historically been one of the world's most dynamic locales of cultural interaction, situated as it is at the crux of maritime trade between the two great monsoon systems of Southern Asia. While today it is the world's most populous Muslim nation, its diverse heritage also reflects historical experiences of and interactions between Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese traditions, Christianity, and a great number of indigenous cultures. These countries provide an incredible wealth of material that has the potential to serve as a particularly rich resource for comparative study to deepen our understanding of the complex heritage of maritime Southern Asia in broader contexts.

In each of these countries, the MAHS works with our local partners to hire, equip, and train national survey teams to conduct full-time heritage survey and documentation. We will create, preserve and make open-access records of diverse and historically significant forms of material culture produced over centuries of commercial and cultural interactions across this region. Our in-country field teams deploy digital technologies including GPS/RTK (Real-Time Kinetic) mapping, digital photography, documentary video, oral history interviews, IIF (International Image Interoperability Framework) standard manuscript digitizations, CAD architectural plans and elevations, as well as aerial and terrestrial LiDAR to produce rich, multimedia documentation of sites in our survey area.

The MAHS combines this field documentation carried out by members of the project teams in each country and collaborative work with a range of existing initiatives across the region to integrate existing data sets into a new framework within a robust, user friendly, and stably preserved online archive. This will make a wealth of new material from multiple countries across the region available in open access, to facilitate the comparative study of the connected histories of these maritime Asian societies, as well as for use in heritage management programs and by local communities. The full project data set will also be permanently archived in the digital repositories of Kyoto University and the Bodleian Library's Oxford Research Archive. Large point-cloud files for LiDAR scans and photogrammetry will also be made available through Creative Commons licensing through <https://openheritage3d.org>. The MAHS digital archive can be accessed at: <http://maritimeasiaheritage.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp>.

## Participate

We are always open to considering new collaborations to enhance the digital documentation of heritage across the region both within and beyond the specific countries where fieldwork is currently underway. Interested organizations are welcome to contact us at: [MAHS@cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp](mailto:MAHS@cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp).

R. Michael Feener, Kyoto University Center for Southeast Asian Studies/ Associate Member, Oxford University Faculty of History, Principal Investigator and Project Leader

Patrick Daly, Earth Observatory of Singapore, Co-Investigator

Noboru Ishikawa, Kyoto University Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Co-Investigator

## Notes

- 1 Patrick Daly et al. 2019. 'Archaeological Evidence that a late 14th-century Tsunami Devastated the Coast of Northern Sumatra and Redirected History', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 116.22; <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1902241116>

# The Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies

## A most rewarding challenge

Edwin Pietersma

In March 2018, I graduated with an MA in Asian Studies from Leiden University, opting for the IIAS Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies. Through this programme, I also graduated with an MA from the Department of Anthropology at National Taiwan University in January 2020.



Edwin Pietersma in the 'Sweat Room' of the Leiden University Academy Building, where after graduation he was allowed to sign his name on the wall, in accordance with university tradition.

My studies in Leiden and then at National Taiwan University (NTU) are experiences that I will remember for the rest of my life. I became interested in Asian Studies during my first year as a bachelor's student of History at the University of Groningen. I soon got fed up with the Eurocentric approach to history, where everything eventually ended up with historians feeling the need to include Europe as the main protagonist, and I decided to change my direction and do a minor in 'Non-Western History'. It led to a fascination for Japanese history, in particular Meiji history and Japanese colonialism. After this, as I had developed a more profound interest in the country, I decided to go to Japan and learn the language. It led to a year abroad at Osaka University, where I reached the N2 level in Japanese (B2/C1 according to the CEFR), and was able to conduct research in Japanese that would form the basis of my two theses; and later led to a new adventure, which was Taiwan.

I was the second person following this track of the IIAS Double Degree programme in Critical Heritage Studies at National Taiwan University. Learning from my predecessor, I had understood that proficiency in Mandarin was recommended but not necessary. Instead, a show of commitment would suffice. Given my experience with Japanese, I knew learning Mandarin would not be easy yet crucial for a

successful stay. Therefore, from August 2018 to February 2019, I enrolled in a Mandarin language centrum affiliated with NTU (the Chinese Language Division). I was extremely fortunate to be granted the *Huayu Mandarin Enrichment*-scholarship from the Taiwanese Ministry of Education. These six months of 15 hours of class and 25 hours of self-study each week were a fantastic start to this adventure, as it allowed me to settle into the country smoothly. Even though I had acquainted myself with the Chinese characters before my relocation, I knew it would be near impossible to master the language this soon. Assuming that this would not be a problem, I continued my application and was accepted into NTU in November 2018.

Before, and after, my acceptance into the programme, I often met with the Faculty's director, Dr Lin Kai-Shi. With extreme kindness and concern, his door was always open for anyone needing guidance and advice. However, these discussions soon revealed a misunderstanding about the language requirements: while the first candidates of the Double Degree programme could still circumvent the (official) language requirements, this would no longer be possible for future students. He advised me that I should just try. Language indeed became my biggest struggle, as most of my classes were in Mandarin.

A stark difference between Leiden University and NTU, which became more

apparent in the second semester with the arrival of two other students from Leiden, was the class structure and setting. Being accustomed to the education system of the Netherlands, I was unaware of how privileged I was. At home, classes last no longer than two hours with a limited number of assignments and readings, carefully mapped out in a set number of hours translated to ECTS. In Taiwan's case, which is American-based, credits are calculated based on the number of hours spent in class each week. This means that a three-credit course is three hours per week of class, excluding assignments and readings. Often, there is a syllabus with minimal information. This situation allows room for the teacher's creativity and freedom and for more dynamics in the classroom. However, this system also leads to notable differences in the work-load of the various courses with a similar number of credits. For one class, I only had to show up every week while having no readings and a final writing assignment of two pages. For another, I had to read a book of over 400 pages before class, write a reflection before and after class, join an extra two-hour reading group, and write an end-of-term paper. Both classes were awarded the same number of credits. Therefore, it was hard to plan and at the end of the semester I felt like I had been on a rollercoaster. There were also other miscommunications, such as about the necessary credits to fulfil. An added challenge was that Taiwanese students usually spend three years on this programme. I was trying to do it in one year, in a language I did not yet fully master.

Several factors led to the completion of the degree. First of all, it would not have been possible without the kindness and flexibility of the professors. I was fortunate to have already received such kindness from IIAS and again in Taiwan. Secondly, the vibrancy and beauty of the country also helped a lot. For example, in Taipei and on Green Island, I visited heritage sites of the martial-law period. Traveling around the country allowed me to reconsider many of my previous assumptions on topics I had already researched for years, something I had not imagined possible. Another bonus was the food markets, one found just across campus, allowing me to have a small moment of indulgence every day. Thirdly, I was equally blessed with my partner living in Thailand and our plans to meet every month, either in the countries we lived or somewhere in between. This allowed me to intensify my experience with different perspectives across Asia and appreciate how much I learned from classes and living in Taipei.

After completing the degree, I moved to Thailand as my immediate future plans were unsure. However, due to the pandemic I had to return to the Netherlands by the end of March. In the meantime, I have been applying for jobs and academic opportunities. I have not yet been able to return to Thailand, Taiwan, or Japan. Currently, I am working for the Dutch Health Agency in tackling the coronavirus by helping people get tested for the virus. I often look back on the Double Degree programme with pride and happiness. In the future, I hope to find a job or PhD position to which I can apply myself with the same amount of excitement and determination as for the Double Degree. And to pay forward some

of the received kindness. Here, I want to express my gratitude to IIAS, particularly Dr Elena Paskaleva, Dr Willem Vogelsang, Dr Philippe Peycam, and all the professors and staff at the National Taiwan University, including Dr Kai-Shi Lin, Dr Cheng-Heng Chang, Dr David Cohen, and Hui-Xuan.

Edwin Pietersma  
edwinpietersma1993@gmail.com

## The Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies

Over the past few years, IIAS has been intensively engaged with the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS) and targeted Asian partners in the development of a special master's (and PhD) track in the field of 'Critical Heritage Studies'. The uniqueness of this initiative is that the MA in Leiden will be combined with a parallel set of courses at a number of Asian universities, allowing for the students to obtain a double degree at the end of their training.

To date, the Asian partners involved are National Taiwan University in Taiwan and Yonsei University in South Korea, and contacts with other possible Asian partner institutes have been established.

At Leiden University, students can opt for a specialisation in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe within the MA Asian Studies track 'History, Arts and Culture'. Inspired and supported by the IIAS Asian Heritages research cluster, the curriculum allows students to explore the contested character of all representations of culture, the plurality of notions of heritage in Asian and European contexts, and the way distinct and conflicting values of indigenous, local communities and official state discourses are negotiated.

Upon successful completion of the whole programme, the students will obtain three diplomas in total: the Leiden University MA diploma, the partner university MA diploma (two-year programme, of which the Leiden MA qualifies as one year) and a separate certificate for the Double MA Degree in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe, issued by IIAS.

The 'Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies' programme is supervised by Dr Elena Paskaleva (IIAS/LIAS), coordinator of the Asian Heritages cluster at IIAS.

Contact: Elena Paskaleva  
e.g.paskaleva@hum.leidenuniv.nl

More information:  
<https://www.iias.asia/programmes/critical-heritage-studies>



Above: Visiting Kaohsiung, Taiwan, with family.

Below: The University of Ghana.



In October 2020, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation extended a new grant to the IAS *Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World* program (HaB) and its 18 partners in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, to support the program's consolidation and institutionalisation.

<https://humanitiesacrossborders.org>

<https://www.ias.asia/programmes/hab>

# Advancing humanist pedagogies

## Principles of academic freedom at The University of Ghana

Kojo Opoku Aidoo

The IAS *Humanities across Borders* program (HaB) arrived at The University of Ghana in 2017. The University of Ghana (established in 1948) has always been quintessentially encyclopaedic with a tradition of bounded disciplines.<sup>1</sup> It has consistently placed a very high premium on rigorous, performance-oriented, test-dominated pedagogical approaches. Such approaches have tended to dismiss, even refute, the humanistic pedagogical approach. Even though more recently there have also been indications of a movement towards community engagement, and possible rectification of the colonial pedagogy mind-set, the university's initial response to HaB was nevertheless ambiguous; simultaneously welcoming and hesitant.

### The civic role of the University

The University of Ghana, the premier and largest university in Ghana, was founded by and for the British colonial regime in the immediate post-WWII era. It was built on a model of scholarship developed in the United Kingdom. The university's self-stated key objective and functional role is to conduct research and to pursue new truths and scientific methods, so as to advance social progress. To do this, a comprehensive system of scholarly freedom is embedded in the university's statutes. The university's Academic Freedom Guideline states that "... The University of Ghana by the nature of its core business should provide an environment that fosters the free pursuit of knowledge and artistic creations through teaching, learning, research and dissemination of knowledge and artistic performances. The assurance of academic freedom is critical in pursuance of this goal". Further, "...academic staff have the freedom to pursue their research and artistic creations, subject to the universal principles and methods of scientific enquiry, without

interference from the university or the state".<sup>3</sup> This guarantees that both faculty and students can engage in intellectual debates without fear of bowdlerisation or retribution, thus establishing faculty members' right to remain true to their pedagogical philosophy and intellectual commitments.

Two significant problems emerged, however. First, the university has over the years been insulating itself from the wider society, thereby excluding local voices, and in so doing, has been maintaining and encouraging a coloniality of education. The university is clearly embedded in a contradiction, between the lofty ideal of advancing social progress and the apparent exclusion of locally-generated knowledge and voices, which are equally legitimate. This lopsidedness amounts to what Nyamnjoh refers to as "... unequal encounters and dogmatic propensities in the production and circulation of meaning and value, which has received far less emancipatory scholarly attention beyond proliferating spurious rhetoric and prescriptive lip service".<sup>4</sup> The second problem is that the university, based on the rational scientific method, appears to be acting against its and our own best interests. Humans act irrationally, as observed by behavioural economics, for example. Rational science ignores such long-established fact.

In this regard, Ndlovu-Gatsheni admonishes the African academy, and calls for "a radical turning over of a new leaf, predicated on decolonial turn and epistemic freedom".<sup>5</sup> Diagne appeals to African academics "to go beyond the simple denunciation of epistemic coloniality or the demand for epistemic freedom to produce affirmative, positive

assertions that lay clear the presence of Africa and Africans in the production of an enlightening and liberating knowledge".<sup>6</sup> For this to happen, the historical processes that have framed the African academy and intellectuals, the issue of autonomy and democracy have to be at the fore and centre of the discourses on scholarly freedoms in Africa. To better comprehend the nature of the research environment in Africa and to reflect on the social and material context of research as an intellectual activity, CODESRIA co-organised a major conference on academic freedom and research in Africa in Kampala in 1990.<sup>7</sup> Claude Ake, touching on the material base of academic freedom, maintained that the democratic aspirations of the nationalist movement were betrayed when most post-colonial African leaders decided to inherit the colonial system rather than transform them democratically. And, in the course of dealing with the alienation and resentment that this produced, they became authoritarian, repressive and coercive.

### Academic freedom and the coloniality of education

Academic freedom is basically embedded in the right to education. First, it means that both faculty and students can engage in intellectual debate without fear. Second, it establishes a faculty's right to remain true to their pedagogical viewpoint and intellectual commitments. It is a preservation of the critical norm of intellectual integrity of the educational system. Thus, not only are debate and dissent critical to the pursuit of knowledge, but so also

is the freedom to search for truth and to publish and disseminate what one holds to be true. This in itself is intrinsically linked to the notion of the rule of law and fundamental rights, most notably, free expression and free speech in general. It is important to point out that questions have often been raised about the role that coercive authoritarian governments may play on universities campuses, presumably believed to be strongholds of academic freedom outside their reach. Today, in parts of Africa, the 'rule of law' has become a code word for allowing governments to supplant 'scholarly freedoms'. And this is accomplished by resorting to colonial laws that remain in the statute books of many post-colonial states.

I would like to share a personal experience of how due process of law stifles academic freedom in contemporary Africa. On 17 May 2012, I was due to present a seminar paper at the Institute of African Studies (University of Ghana) on 'How incomplete capitalism encourages capital accumulation via predatory trajectories: the case of the Woyome scandal'. This was a preliminary sketch, a contribution towards the view that underdeveloped capitalism engenders a primitive accumulation of capital via predatory, corrupt trajectories. The Woyome scandal in Ghana, described in the media as financial malfeasance, involved a leading financier of the then ruling National Democratic Congress, who in connivance with politicians and state technocrats managed to secure and pay judgment debts running into millions of Ghana Cedis. A day before my presentation, a group of lecturers and administrators at the university called for its cancellation on the grounds that since the

**"In a world structured by global coloniality, there is no African future without epistemic freedom"**

Ndlovu-Gatsheni<sup>2</sup>



matter was before a court of law, we could be cited for contempt of court. The seminar was called off.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, the rule that was cited to me as law was one used by the British courts to stifle the Irish during the height of the British-Irish war. Imported without thinking, and applied quite rabidly and opportunistically by the courts and by a coterie that stepped into the shoes of the British when they left, this rule was clearly unconstitutional vis-a-vis the freedom of speech and academic freedom provisions of Ghana's 1992 Constitution and the University of Ghana Act. It is unfortunate that we are still colonised in almost everything.

The rule of law is being used to stifle scholarly freedoms in contemporary Africa. In the past, coercive authoritarian governments employed violence to silence debate and dissent. That was easier to identify, classify and contest. The new trend seems to conceal the attack on academic freedom and free speech under the cloak of democracy and due process of law. This new development is slight and subtle and difficult to perceive or understand. Nevertheless, it constitutes a veritable abuse of academic freedom. For now, we can only take refuge in Bertrand Russell's admonition, in praising Karl Popper's 'The Open Society and its Enemies' to be "vigorous and profound (in our) defence of democracy".<sup>9</sup> It is on the basis of such dynamic and reflective democracy that we will construct a humanistic system of education in which the academy and communities, hand-in-hand, would co-create knowledge that liberates. How then can Africans begin to ponder, theorise, interpret the world and write from where they are located, unencumbered by Eurocentrism certainly, but beyond that, by inimical colonial laws that remain in the statute books? This remains the biggest challenge yet to academic freedom.

### Advancing humanist pedagogies

Structured along the lines of Cambridge and Oxford universities and established by ordinance in 1948, the University of Ghana has been a quintessential encyclopaedic one with a tradition of 'bounded disciplines'. Seen largely as an 'ivory tower', the university, since its inception, has placed a very high premium on rigorous, performance-oriented, test-dominated pedagogical approaches. Such approaches have tended to peripheralise, if not entirely negate, the humanistic pedagogical approach.

Nonetheless, two specific developments profoundly altered university-community relations. The first event was the establishment in 1963 of the Institute of African Studies as an autonomous body within the University to "engage in the regeneration of Africa and her peoples through knowledge production, dissemination, application and preservation". Allman noted that Ghana's founding president, Kwame Nkrumah, sought to transform both scholarly and public understandings of African history and culture locally and globally through the Institute of African Studies and the *Encyclopaedia Africana*.<sup>10</sup> During the launch of the institute, Nkrumah declared: "When we were planning this University, I knew that a many-sided Institute of African Studies which should fertilize the University, and through the University, the Nation, was a vital part of it". It was W.E.B. Du Bois who conceived the *Encyclopaedia Africana* idea, as a scientific and comprehensive work on Africa and peoples of African descent that "would refute the Enlightenment notion of blacks as devoid of civilization and the hallmarks of humanity".

The second development was the establishment of the radio programme 'Interrogating Africa', broadcast weekly on 'Radio Unvers' since 2013, in which Institute of African Studies faculty share their research findings, and important developmental and educational messages, with not only the university community, but also members of the neighbouring communities. 'Interrogating Africa' is an interactive radio show that allows callers to contribute to discussions. An emergent system of co-creation of knowledge is, as a result, being institutionalised,



## HaB at The University of Ghana

### Project: 'Mobilities of Grassroot Pan-Africanism. Memory, migration and communities'

A defining feature of post-colonial West Africa is increasing cross-border migration, making the region a quintessential 'social laboratory' through which to interrogate and heighten our comprehension of memory, migrations and pan-Africanist ideals. The Ghana project relates to memory, migration, communities, and new ways of Pan-Africanism in connection with the historical, comparative and contemporary issues such as the Nigerian, Malian, Burkinabe and Senegalese diasporas in Ghana, and mobility in West Africa in general. The migrations have tended to challenge the nation-state and also xenophobia. And, in some instances, they have even led to the construction of parallel political economies different from those under the

influence of the states. Two things stand out, namely place-making and meaning-making. The project explores the existing body of knowledge on memory (itself contestable and manipulatable), migration and new ways of pan Africanism. <https://tinyurl.com/HaB-MGPA>

#### Methodology workshop

The HaB Methodology Workshop, 'Mobilities of Grassroots Pan-Africanism: Integrating Community-Generated Knowledge into a Pan-African Curriculum' took place on 12-13 June 2018 in the western regional twin-city, Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana. <https://tinyurl.com/HaB-Mworkshop>

#### Radio interview

Kojo Opoku Aidoo discussed the HaB Project on 26 October 2017 on Radio Unvers' 'Interrogating Africa' on air show at University of Ghana. <https://tinyurl.com/HaB-AidooRadio>

#### Project update

<https://tinyurl.com/HaB-MGPAupdate>



Photos taken during the workshop:  
Above, Dr Amponsah interacting with participants.  
Left, Mr Arjee sharing his lived experience.

Below: Dr Kawlra and Dr Aidoo at the Kokrobitey Institute.



thereby enriching the theory and praxis of humanistic knowledge production. Despite the proclivities towards coloniality of pedagogy, the University of Ghana seems to have made efforts at decolonising education, even if progress remains meagre. The establishment of a radio station is an indication of a movement towards community engagement, and possible rectification of the colonial pedagogy mind-set.

### The Humanities across Borders program

In 2017, the *Humanities across Borders: Africa and Asia program* (HaB) arrived at The University of Ghana, a colonially created

encyclopaedic academy. The university's initial response to HaB was ambiguous; simultaneously welcoming and hesitant. For the University of Ghana, HaB was intellectually potentially disruptive of its elitist history and standing, or even 'revolutionary'. The biggest challenge was to get the university to buy into this new, pioneering, humanistic pedagogical model. Whilst the Vice-Chancellor of the university, the Director of the Institute of African Studies, and the Association of African Universities were generally receptive to the new programme, most faculty members remained incredulous, if not in total opposition. Two solutions presented themselves. First was the slow process of explanations required to highlight the efficacy of the humanistic pedagogy.

Second was to call on the principles of academic freedom on which the university was originally established: the freedom to pursue and disseminate knowledge and to determine the worthy object of the humanistic knowledge.

The *Humanities across Borders* program represents an intellectually and methodologically disruptive and radical departure from the pedagogical practices that I am familiar with. In the course of developing a humanistic pedagogy, I encountered griot-like figures (migrants in Ghana, Togo, and Benin) during field stints, who build their knowledge through their analyses of how the world is. They are regarded for their reflective philosophical knowledge, as 'walking libraries' with up-to-date knowledge and histories of their communities. With wide-ranging historical knowledge, they demonstrate unlimited possibilities for the formal educational establishment. They tell their stories from memory extemporaneously, elaborating on actions and events. These experiences challenge the conventional pedagogical paradigms and call for alternative frameworks. The formal classroom setting with its structural limitations and trappings of scripted literacy curriculum can benefit immeasurably from such wise, knowledgeable griot-like figures.

In a very practical way, this short article reflects my divided self, but also a growing syncretisation that I seem to be experiencing: me as a traditional educator and me as a humanistic pedagogue in the setting of a typical encyclopaedic university. Tensions, opportunities and restrictions exist between these two selves. To confess, my pedagogical practice, until I became part of the *Humanities across Borders* program, failed to meet the stringent standards set by Paulo Freire,<sup>11</sup> or the key objectives of HaB, which include 'to go beyond classroom and textbook-based pedagogies and to deploy embodied teaching and learning practices'; 'to seek non-textual, lived sources of knowledge and their modes of transmission'; and 'to work with local communities and civil society actors to jointly formulate research agendas'. Thankfully, a clear prognosis is that as HaB enters its second phase, we at The University of Ghana will be able to consolidate, institutionalise, and build upon the achievements made so far.

Kojo Opoku Aidoo, Head of the History and Politics Section of the Institute of African Studies, The University of Ghana, and a Research Fellow at the same institute. He is also the Principle Investigator of the HaB project 'Mobilities of Grassroot Pan-Africanism'. <http://ias.ug.edu.gh/content/dr-kojo-opoku-aidoo>

#### Notes

- <https://www.ug.edu.gh/about/university-history>
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni is referring to the epistemological turn in the movement to decolonise education.
- 'The University of Ghana Guidelines for the Assurance of Academic Freedom, Creativity and Innovation', accessible from <http://tiny.cc/GhanaUniAcademicFreedom>
- Nyananjoh's review of: Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. 2018. *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization*. Routledge.
- ibid., Ndlovu-Gatsheni.
- Bachir Diagne's review of: ibid., Ndlovu-Gatsheni.
- 'The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility', 29 November 1990, Kampala, Uganda; <https://www.codesria.org/spip.php?article350>
- <https://humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog/due-process-law-and-academic-freedom-personal-narrative>
- Popper, K. 2011. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Routledge.
- Allman, J. 2013. 'Kwame Nkrumah, African Studies, and the Politics of Knowledge Production in the Black Star of Africa', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 46(2):181-203, Boston University African Studies Center.
- Freire, P. 1993. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum Book.

## Asian studies titles at AUP

Amsterdam University Press (AUP) has a well-established list in Asian Studies, renowned for its solid source-based publications in the history, religion, politics, migration, and culture of the peoples and states of Asia. The Asian Studies programme is strengthened by a number of book series, focusing on a special topic or an area of study. <https://www.aup.nl/en/academic/discipline/asian-studies>



### Wang Bing's Filmmaking of the China Dream: Narratives, Witnesses and Marginal Spaces

Elena Pollacchi. 2021.  
Series: Critical Asian Cinemas  
ISBN 9789463721837

This volume offers an organic discussion of Wang Bing's filmmaking across China's marginal spaces and against the backdrop of the state-sanctioned 'China Dream'. Wang's work has contemporary China as its focus and testifies to the country's contradictions, not dissimilar to those of contemporary societies dealing with issues of inequality, labour, and migration.

Without being an activist, Wang Bing gives voice to the subaltern. His internationally awarded documentaries are recognized as world masterpieces. His unique aesthetics bears references to film masters, therefore

this investigation goes beyond the divide between Western and non-Western film traditions.

Elena Pollacchi is Lecturer in Chinese Studies at Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Italy) and in Sweden (Stockholm University and Gothenburg University).

<https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463721837/wang-bing-s-filmmaking-of-the-china-dream>



### Decoding the Sino-North Korean Borderlands

Adam Cathcart, Christopher Green and Steven Denney. 2021.  
Series: Asian Borderlands  
ISBN: 9789462987562

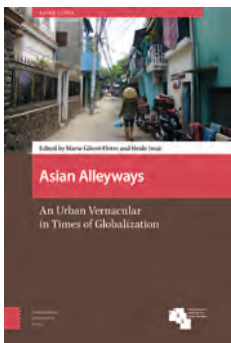
Since the 1990s, the Chinese-North Korean border region has undergone a gradual transformation into a site of intensified cooperation, competition, and intrigue. Drawing on existing studies and new data, *Decoding the Sino-North Korean Borderlands* brings much of this literature into concert by pulling together a wide range of insight on the region's economics, security, social cohesion, and information flows. Drawing from multilingual sources and transnational scholarship, this volume is enhanced by the extensive fieldwork undertaken by the editors and contributors in their quests to decode the borderland.

Adam Cathcart is a lecturer in Chinese history at the University of Leeds

Christopher Green is a lecturer in Korean Studies at Leiden University in the Netherlands.

Steven Denney is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, University of Toronto.

<https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789462987562/decoding-the-sino-north-korean-borderlands>



### Asian Alleyways: An Urban Vernacular in Times of Globalization

Marie Gibert-Flutre and Heide Imai (eds). 2020.  
Series: Asian Cities  
ISBN 9789463729604

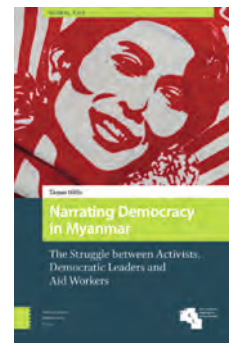
*Asian Alleyways: An Urban Vernacular in Times of Globalization* critically explores 'Global Asia' and the metropolization process, specifically from its alleyways, which are understood as ordinary neighbourhood landscapes providing the setting for everyday urban life and place-based identities being shaped by varied everyday practices, collective experiences and forces. Beyond the mainstream, standardising vision of the metropolization process, *Asian Alleyways* offers a nuanced overview of urban production in Asia at a time of great changes, and will be welcomed by an array of scholars,

students, and all those interested in the modern transformation of Asian cities and their urban cultures.

Marie Gibert-Flutre is Assistant Professor of Geography in the Department of East Asia Studies (LCAO) at the University of Paris.

Heide Imai is Associate Professor at Senshu University, Faculty of Intercultural Communication, Tokyo, Japan.

<https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463729604/asian-alleyways>



### Narrating Democracy in Myanmar: The Struggle Between Activists, Democratic Leaders and Aid Workers

Tamas Wells, 2021  
Series: Global Asia  
ISBN: 9789463726153

This book analyses what Myanmar's struggle for democracy has signified to Burmese activists and democratic leaders, and to their international allies. In doing so, it explores how understanding contested meanings of democracy helps make sense of the country's tortuous path since Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won historic elections in 2015. Using Burmese and English language sources, *Narrating Democracy in Myanmar* reveals how the country's ongoing struggles for democracy exist not only in opposition to Burmese military elites, but also within

networks of local activists and democratic leaders, and international aid workers.

Tamas Wells is a Research Fellow in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne.

<https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463726153/narrating-democracy-in-myanmar>



### Rural-Urban Migration and Agro-Technological Change in Post-Reform China

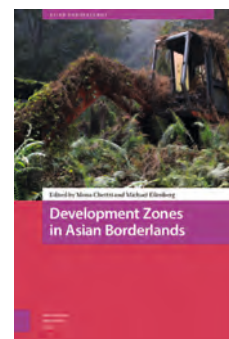
Lena Kaufmann. 2021.  
Series: New Mobilities in Asia  
ISBN 9789463729734

How do rural Chinese households deal with the conflicting pressures of migrating into cities to work as well as staying at home to preserve their fields? This is particularly challenging for rice farmers, because paddy fields have to be cultivated continuously to retain their soil quality and value. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and written sources, *Rural-Urban Migration and Agro-Technological Change in Post-Reform China* describes farming households' strategic solutions to this predicament. It shows how, in light of rural-urban migration and agro-technological change, they manage to sustain

both migration and farming. It innovatively conceives rural households as part of a larger farming community of practice that spans both staying and migrating household members and their material world.

Lena Kaufmann is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of History and an associate lecturer at the Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies, both at the University of Zurich.

<https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463729734/rural-urban-migration-and-agro-technological-change-in-post-reform-china>



### Development Zones in Asian Borderlands

Mona Chettri, Michael Eilenberg (eds). 2020.  
Series: Asian Borderlands  
ISBN: 9789463726238

*Development Zones in Asian Borderlands* maps the nexus between global capital flows, national economic policies, infrastructural connectivity, migration, and aspirations for modernity in the borderlands of South and South-East Asia. In doing so, it demonstrates how these are transforming borderlands from remote, peripheral backyards to front-yards of economic development and state-building. Development zones encapsulate the networks, institutions, politics and processes specific to enclave development, and offer a new analytical framework for thinking about borderlands;

namely, as sites of capital accumulation, territorialisation and socio-spatial changes.

Mona Chettri is a Next Generation Network Scholar at the Australia-India Institute, University of Western Australia.

Michael Eilenberg is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Aarhus University, Denmark.

<https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463726238/development-zones-in-asian-borderlands>

## The Newsletter issues online

We are excited to inform you that you can now find all issues of *The Newsletter* on our website, open access of course, going back to the very first one published in 1993.

Over the past 28 years, the paper version of *The Newsletter* has been through a number of redesigns and has enjoyed various 'looks', but so too has its online sibling. The current issues are produced entirely digitally, and are simply sent to the printers by email, only to miraculously appear in print a few days later. But it was not always that easy. The first 26 issues, produced between 1993 and 2001, were done the 'old-fashioned' way. The paper version was put together at the printers, and a digital copy never existed.

Now, thanks to the invaluable support provided by our colleagues at Leiden University Libraries 'Special Collections', we

have been able to scan all of the earlier issues. The resulting PDFs are fully searchable, and have recently been added to our website's section for *The Newsletter*. This was a vital step in our ambition to make all of our issues available to as many readers as possible.

The online versions of issues 73 and onwards are currently the most complete: each item on the content page leads you to an 'article page' where a full printable version of the text can be found, alongside a link to the paper version PDF.

Issues 27-72 provide you with a content page where you can open individual PDF pages correlating to each article. Full text printable pages have not yet been created, but this will likely be our next step in the process!

We hope you will enjoy browsing through our previous issues, as well as catching up with our most recent. All of which can be found on [www.iias.asia/the-newsletter](http://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter).



Above: Selection of previous newsletters available to view online.

## Continuation of Humanities Across Borders (HAB)

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is pleased to announce that it has been awarded a third grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in New York to support the consolidation and institutionalisation of its flagship collaborative education program 'Humanities Across Borders' (HAB). From building a trans-regional network of partners, to testing out-of-classroom and community embedded experiential pedagogies in HaB 1.0, in this next phase, HAB and its 18 partners in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, will mobilise institutions into a new pattern of South-South-North collaboration in higher education.

The three institutional innovations envisioned for HAB 2.0 are:

- i) a global consortium with its commitment to public humanist values in education;
- ii) a foundational curricular platform in 'Humanities Across Borders' co-created and co-taught across the consortium's geographies; and
- iii) an interactive digital platform and pedagogical resource repository, made widely accessible through partner libraries.

In this way we hope to build a collaborative model of locally rooted, globally conscious, higher education that, until now, has been an aspirational ideal for many universities attempting to achieve educational justice goals. In the coming years, we will disseminate the programme's situated learning approach extensively, via the consortium's website, publications, conferences, and other pedagogical events, and hope to encourage other institutions to join our endeavour.

On behalf of IIAS and its partners, I wish to express our sincere gratitude to The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for its vision and support to HAB and its efforts in re-enchanting public humanist values among academe today.

Philippe Peycam, IIAS Director

Follow the program activities here: <https://humanitiesacrossborders.org>

## Textual Heritage

Online Symposium  
22-24 March 2021  
Registration and further information:  
[www.unive.it/textualheritage](http://www.unive.it/textualheritage)



Join the first symposium entirely dedicated to 'textual heritage', and explore the many facets of this new analytical concept!

How have literature, historical chronicles, musical notations, inscriptions, manuscripts, books and scrolls shaped our cultural heritage, and how will they change in the 21st century? How do the processes of reading, writing, copying, translating and performing texts inform and transform notions of authenticity, authorship, ownership, as well as the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage?

A dozen specialists from different disciplines and areas – many early career scholars – will discuss fresh approaches to textual sources, engaging with the latest developments in the field of heritage. On each of the first two days, keynotes by Prof. Wiebke Denecke (MIT) and Prof. David C. Harvey (Aarhus University), will kick off the debate. On the final day, a lively roundtable will bring the program to a close. Attendance is free, but registration is kindly required.

**Organisation**  
Department of Asian and North African Studies, Ca' Foscari University of Venice  
In collaboration with Waseda University Top Global University program.

**Registration**  
For registration and further information, check out the dedicated website [www.unive.it/textualheritage](http://www.unive.it/textualheritage)

## IIAS webinar series

IIAS organises webinars on a variety of Asia-related topics, held by IIAS fellows and other speakers. All webinars (and updates to the schedule) are announced on our website at [www.iias.asia/events](http://www.iias.asia/events).

You are most welcome to join (free of charge) by registering online in advance.

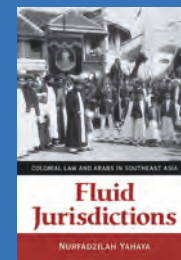
We will subsequently contact you with further information on how to participate.

Our previous webinars can be viewed on our YouTube channel [www.youtube.com/asianstudies](http://www.youtube.com/asianstudies).

The following speakers have been confirmed for the coming period, and we will be adding new lectures to the list as time goes on.

22 March 2021

Book talk  
*Fluid Jurisdictions: Colonial Law and Arabs in Southeast Asia*



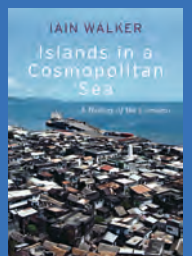
Speaker:  
Nurfaizilah Yahaya (author)

21 April 2021

Speaker: Norah Gharala (title to be confirmed)

29 April 2021

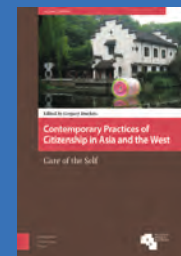
Book talk  
*Islands in a Cosmopolitan Sea: A History of the Comoros*



Speaker:  
Iain Walker (author)

24 March 2021

Book talk  
*Contemporary Practices of Citizenship in Asia and the West: Care of the Self*



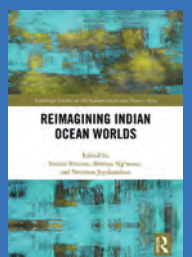
Speaker:  
Gregory Bracken (author)

19 May 2021

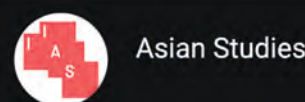
Speaker: Hedwig Waters (title to be confirmed)

26 May 2021

Book talk  
*Reimagining Indian Ocean Worlds*



Speakers:  
Smriti Srinivas, Bettina Ng'weno, Neelima Jeychandran (authors)



Connect with the global world of Asian Studies

Webinars [www.youtube.com/asianstudies](http://www.youtube.com/asianstudies)



# 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 concerned 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 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).

### Symposium

'Neighborhood Transformation in East Asian Cities: Is 'Gentrification' the Right Frame of Reference?', 30 August-1 Sept 2021, Chiba, Japan.

<https://ukna.asia/events/neighborhood-transformation-east-asian-cities-gentrification-right-frame-reference>

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

Coordinator: Paul Rabé

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

Clusters: Asian Cities; Asian Heritages

SEANNET is about research, teaching and dissemination of knowledge on Asia through the prism of the neighbourhood. Supported by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, NY (2017-2020), case studies were carried out in six selected cities in Southeast Asia (Mandalay, Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Manila, Surabaya). SEANNET seeks to engage the humanistic social sciences in a dialogue with urban stakeholders as co-contributors of alternative knowledge about cities. This is done through a combination of participatory

## Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network (SEANNET)

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

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

Coordinators: Paul Rabé

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

and Rita Padawangi Singapore

University of Social Sciences

[ritapadawangi@suss.edu.sg](mailto:ritapadawangi@suss.edu.sg)

Cluster: Asian Cities



## The Forum on Health, Environment and Development (FORHEAD)

The Forum on Health, Environment and Development (FORHEAD) is an interdisciplinary network that brings together natural, medical and social scientists to explore the implications of environmental and social change for public health in China and beyond.

[www.iias.asia/programmes/forhead](http://www.iias.asia/programmes/forhead)

Coordinator: Jennifer Holdaway

[j.a.holdaway.2@iias.nl](mailto:j.a.holdaway.2@iias.nl)

Cluster: Global Asia



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

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.asia/programmes/critical-heritage-studies](http://www.iias.asia/programmes/critical-heritage-studies)

Coordinator: Elena Paskaleva

[e.g.paskaleva@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:e.g.paskaleva@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

Cluster: Asian Heritages





## Humanities Across Borders

IIAS is pleased to announce another grant cycle from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to establish 'Humanities Across Borders' (HAB) as an *institutional* intervention in higher education. In the first phase of HAB (2017-2020), we concentrated our efforts on building a network of partners and experimenting with out-of-classroom, experiential pedagogies. In this next phase, we aim to mobilise existing, stand-alone educational institutions, structures, and processes into new configurations of South-South and South-North collaboration.

In the next five years, we plan to organise our partners into a membership-based consortium, expand the programme's outreach, and formalise and apply HAB's *in situ* or place-based methodologies to real-world societal and ecological concerns in a trans-regional setting. By disseminating HAB's locally situated yet globally connected approach to teaching and learning - through the consortium's website, publications, conferences, and pedagogical events - we hope to encourage other institutions in the global South and North to join our efforts.

Follow the stories on the [Humanities Across Borders Blog](https://humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog) [humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog](https://humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog)

[www.iias.asia/hab](https://www.iias.asia/hab)

Clusters: [Global Asia](#); [Asian Heritages](#)

## Africa-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge



'Africa-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](https://www.africasia.org)

Cluster: [Global Asia](#)



## Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN)



This 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.

The 7th ABRN conference, 'Borderland Futures: Technologies, Zones, Co-existences', has been postponed until June 2022.

[www.asianborderlands.net](https://www.asianborderlands.net)

Coordinator: [Erik de Maaker](#)

[maaker@fsw.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:maaker@fsw.leidenuniv.nl)

Cluster: [Global Asia](#)

## Energy Programme Asia (EPA)

The 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.

[www.iias.asia/programmes/energy-programme-asia](https://www.iias.asia/programmes/energy-programme-asia)

Coordinator: [M. Amineh](#)

[m.p.amineh@uva.nl](mailto:m.p.amineh@uva.nl), [m.p.amineh@iias.nl](mailto:m.p.amineh@iias.nl)

Cluster: [Global Asia](#)

## International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS)



With 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 in Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish; and for PhD Theses in English. Eleven conventions have been held since 1997 (Leiden, Berlin,

Singapore, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Daejeon, Honolulu, Macao, Adelaide, Chiang Mai and Leiden). If the situation allows, then ICAS 12 will take place as planned on 24-27 August 2021 in Kyoto, Japan. However, we may need to consider virtual alternatives to an in-person conference. Please do keep an eye on the website for updates, or sign up to our mailinglist to stay informed.

[www.icas.asia](https://www.icas.asia)

<https://icas.asia/forms/maillinglist>

[icas@iias.nl](mailto:icas@iias.nl)



## Leiden Centre for Indian Ocean Studies

The 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/programmes/leiden-centre-indian-ocean-studies](https://www.iias.asia/programmes/leiden-centre-indian-ocean-studies)

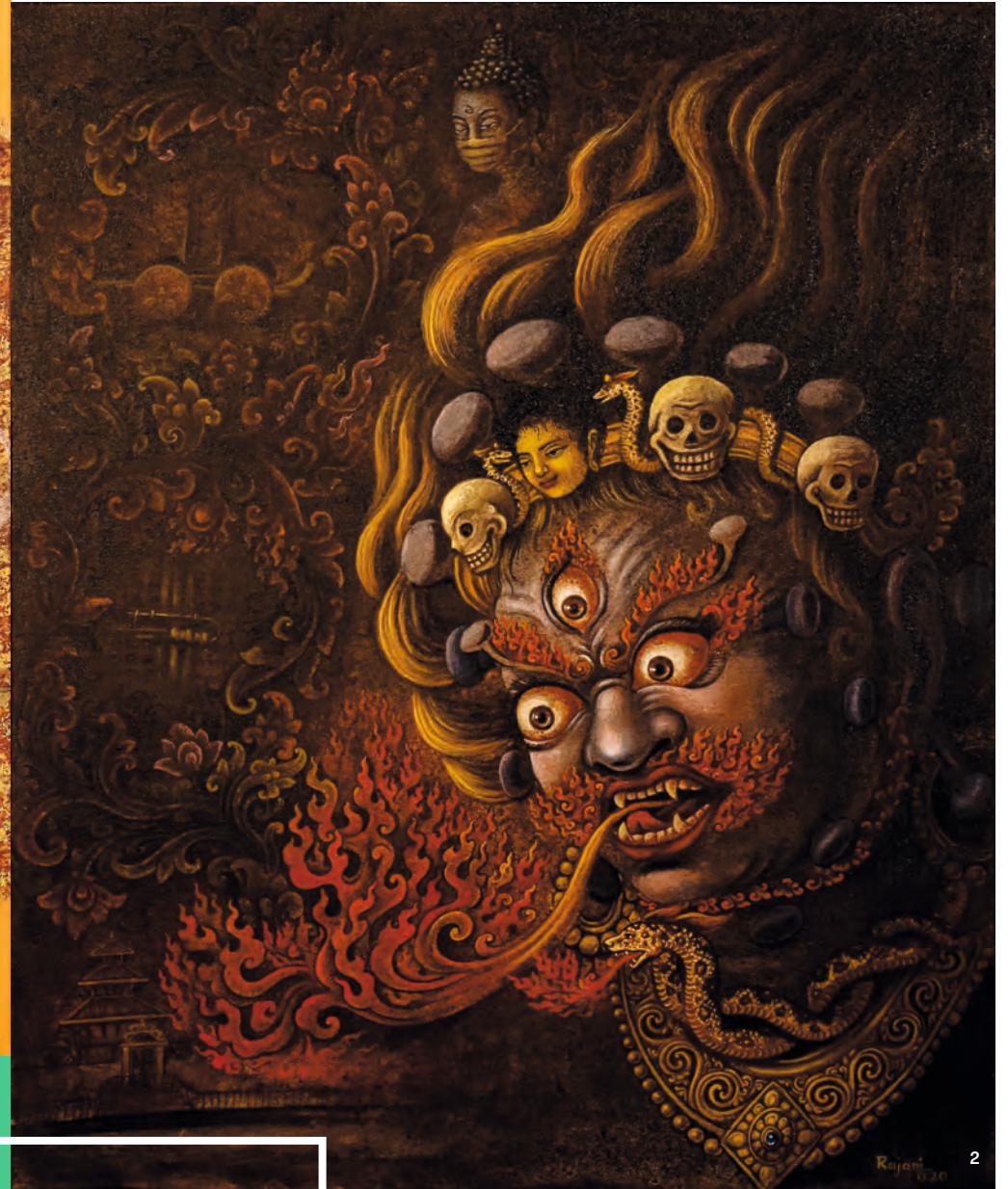
Cluster: [Global Asia](#)

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

The 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.

[www.iias.asia/programmes/newsilkroad](https://www.iias.asia/programmes/newsilkroad)

Cluster: [Global Asia](#)



# A virtual exhibition for remote times

## EXHIBITION

Tangential Stress 2020

## DATE

14 May 2020 - ongoing

## LOCATION

Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA), Kathmandu, Nepal

## FURTHER INFORMATION

<https://360mona.com>



In early 2020, the Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA) was preparing for its grand opening, just as coronavirus grew increasingly ominous worldwide. The museum's permanent collection of contemporary and traditional Nepali art would have to wait until October 2020 to welcome the public. In the interim, MoNA's curator commissioned 19 Nepali artists to produce works dealing with the socioeconomic, ecological, psychological, and emotional impacts of the global pandemic. 'Tangential Stress' is the result; a free, fully virtual exhibition showcasing artwork depicting the multiple ways COVID-19 has transformed life in Nepal and around the world over the past year.

## The Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA)

The Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA) finally opened its doors after eight months of delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequent lockdowns. The new museum is housed on the grounds of the Kathmandu Guest House (KGH), one of the most iconic hotels in Nepal. The MoNA – curated by Rajan Sakya, CEO of the KGH Group of Hotels – aims to create a platform for Nepali artists working in a variety of media and styles. It dedicates a space for the public appreciation and dissemination of Nepal's artistic heritage. The country has a long, rich history of creative production: Hindu devotional art, *Thangka* and *Paubha* paintings, world-renowned statuary, meticulous woodwork, and more. Such traditions continue today, alongside

modern artists working in more contemporary styles. Nepali artwork often hangs in private collections abroad or in foreign museums, such as The Rubin in New York City. Meanwhile, art that remains in Nepal often fails to reach a wider audience. The Museum of Nepali Art seeks to redress this, keeping Nepali art in the country and offering a committed space where the public can experience it.

The MoNA originally scheduled its grand opening for February-March 2020, precisely the months when the scale of COVID-19 was clearly becoming a threat. The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a veritable pandemic on March 11, and Nepal imposed a nationwide lockdown on March 24. The MoNA's permanent collection of art (religious and secular, traditional and contemporary) would have to wait. The museum, however, quickly shifted gears.

Its curator commissioned 19 works by Nepali artists, each addressing pandemic conditions in Nepal. These were swiftly arranged into a digital exhibition entitled 'Tangential Stress'. The virtual interface simulates a walk through the manicured grounds of the Kathmandu Guest House, punctuated by icons representing pieces of art. It launched in May 2020, making it among the earliest exhibits focused on the virus' impacts, and the first virtual showcase of its kind in Nepal.

## 'Tangential Stress' in Pandemic Times

The art of 'Tangential Stress' is diverse, though all of it hinges on the epidemiological, psycho-emotional, and socioeconomic effects of COVID-19. Several of the pieces



take a more expansive view of such effects, depicting the resurgence of nature as humans stayed home, and/or highlighting human perseverance in the face of a biological threat. Sagar Manandhar's *Creativity Never Dies* – composed of abstract flashes of color surrounding the fluid shapes of the world's continents – is a testament to the persistence of creativity and nature during these trying times. Koshal Hamal's *Art in Lockdown* depicts a line of multicolored flowers winding in sharp turns up a bright green canvas, with the blossoms representing the experiences and memories that comprise a life. Asha Dangol's *New Avatar* evokes the Newari *Paubā* style, depicting a deity with five heads: the artist and his wife, but also a pig, buffalo, and cow. Behind the figure, viral particles float above a bright blue Earth, hinting at and hoping for a different ecological future. Similar themes emerge in Prithvi Shrestha's *A Game*, an inventive self-portrait of the artist,

wearing a facemask, surrounded by signs of nature's reassertion.

The now-ubiquitous shape of the SARS-CoV-2 particle, with its signature 'crown' of spike proteins, appears in many of the works on display. Sunita Rana's *आशा (Hope)* has an upbeat, vibrant color scheme in which a human figure emerges from, or perhaps is submerged within, a flood of bubbles and virions. Pradip Kumar Bajracharya's *So Small Yet So Big!!!* depicts ethereal bodies sprawled and tangled beneath enormous renderings of coronavirus particles. The virions loom menacingly above the faceless bodies. The virus, normally invisible, is thus made to feel commensurate with its outsized impacts. Such impacts include economic and geopolitical disparities shaping unequal pandemic outcomes, themes taken up strongly in Binod Pradhan's *Same Planet, Different Effects* and Bhai Raj Maharjan's *Powerlessness*.

Another theme addressed in 'Tangential Stress' is the toll of psychological and social isolation. Batsa Gopal Vaidya's *Lockdown* and Ranju Yadav's *Pregnancy During Pandemic* each portray a singular figure – a masked boy and a pregnant woman, respectively – to evoke the peculiar combination of fear and loneliness characteristic of the COVID era. Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha's series of two-tone, puzzle-like images reflects a pronounced disorientation through optical trickery, a chaos that reverberates with the psychological upheavals wrought by lockdowns. Kiran Manandhar's *The Eternal Debate* yields a similar effect through its poignant portrayal of internal struggles and the conflicting facets of one's self. Among the most effective paintings in this vein is Bidhata KC's *Ekkais Din – 21 Days*. The mixed-media self-portrait represents the artist in quarantine after returning to Nepal from a residency in Vienna. Hers was a literal, spatial isolation as well as a psychological, emotional one. Her piece pays deliberate homage to Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss*, yet with a clear difference: whereas Klimt's famous painting shows two bodies entwined in embrace, KC's self-portrait depicts only herself, looking somber. She is encircled by a ring of airplanes pointing in all directions, which surround a grid of scratchy designs and Nepali numerals, as if marking time on a prison wall.

### Destruction and hope

The exhibition is shot through with a central tension between destruction and hope. Rajani Sinkhwal's *Mahakala: Destruction with Cause* shows the deity of destruction in detail; an apt symbol for a virus wreaking indiscriminate havoc across the world. In the face of such devastation, signs of hope, or at least consolation, can also be found: Pramila Bajracharya's tribute to a healthcare worker in *Your Life Before Mine*, Manish Lal Shrestha's ringing bell exploding with color in *Sound of Silence*, Erina Tamrakar's masked figures tenderly posed in *The Variable Gem*. There is a certain solidarity during lockdown conditions, a recognition that humans are alone, but together. Govinda Lal Singh Dangol's *Daibya*

*Shakti* evokes this feeling by superimposing a globe upon a traditional Nepali door, a white facemask stretched across them both.

All these themes – destruction and solidarity, isolation and hope – stand out in SC Suman's *Hope Amidst Despair*. The sharp composition foregrounds eight scenes of isolation. It looks as if the artist is capturing snapshot views through a series of windows, each one padlocked shut. Silhouettes – likely representing those lost to COVID – float through the marginal spaces between the frames, across a jumbled landscape of buildings and temples, world landmarks and staircases. The 'outside' is menacing, the 'inside' is stifling. An unassuming golden key hangs in the upper-right corner of the painting, hinting at the possibility of opening the padlocks that enforce our confinement, as if the solution to COVID were simple and just beyond reach.

Considering how swiftly 'Tangential Stress' came together, it is admirable how well the commissioned works speak to one another. As a whole, they express the intersecting feelings that have come to characterise life during a global health crisis. Beyond the art's aesthetic merits, the virtual nature of the exhibition amplifies the show's themes: it is the pandemic itself that inhibits in-person appreciation of pandemic paintings. To take a remote, virtual tour constantly reminds viewers of the new reality addressed in the art. In that sense, 'Tangential Stress' is ideally suited to the present moment.

Beyond this exhibition, the museum also launched a second virtual show entitled 'Inception: A Collection of Nepali Masterpieces' (<https://www.360mona.com/inception>), which highlights more traditional styles from Nepal. For those in Kathmandu, the MoNA is now open for public admission.

**Benjamin Linder**, currently a Fellow at IIAS, is an anthropologist focusing on socio-spatial transformations in urban Nepal. He previously worked with MoNA curator Rajan Sakya and others at the Kathmandu Guest House to produce the coffee-table book *Thamel Through Time: Commemorating 50 Years of Kathmandu Guest House and Thamel 1968-2018*.

Fig. 1: *Powerlessness*, by Bhai Raj Maharjan

Fig. 2: *Mahakala - Destruction with cause*, by Rajani Sinkhwal.

Fig. 3: *Your life before mine*, by Pramila Bajracharya.

Fig. 4: *Hope Amidst Despair*, by SC Suman.

Fig. 5: *Ekkais Din – 21 Days*, by Bidhata KC.

Fig. 6: *The variable gem*, by Erina Tamrakar.



# IIAS Fellowship Programme

## In the spotlight

The International Institute for Asian Studies annually hosts a large number of visiting researchers (research 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/fellows](http://www.iias.asia/fellows)



**Norah  
Gharala**

*From Mozambique to Mexico: forced journeys in the early modern Iberian world*

I began my fellowship in February and feel very fortunate to be here. The flexibility of IIAS has been generous, as has my digital reception from scholars in the Netherlands. I am working on a book manuscript about the forced movements of people from Southeastern Africa to Mexico in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, using a central story as a focal point. So far, I have found Leiden an ideal place for reflection and am grateful for the opportunity to research and write. I have online access to relevant materials through the Leiden University Libraries: maps of Southeast Asia; travel accounts; and cutting-edge volumes like *Being a Slave: Histories and Legacies of European Slavery in the Indian Ocean* (edited by Alicia Schrikker and Nira Wickramasinghe of Leiden University, 2020).

Brief references to enslaved people from 'Mozambique in the Indies of Portugal' in Mexican archives caught my attention

a few years ago. Because the mentions were brief, my process of understanding this term has necessitated engagement with archives and libraries beyond Mexico. Part of the first chapter of my book explores early modern European descriptions of the Indian Ocean World and Southeast Asia. These texts collectively contributed meaning to the labels applied to enslaved people. Gold mining, maritime knowledge, loyalty, rebelliousness, and military prowess were some of the practices and traits associated with the term 'mozambique' in Iberian worlds.

Beyond analyzing how Portuguese and Spanish vocabularies incorporated Indian Ocean Africa, my project explores how Africans and Afrodescendants deployed labels. Men sometimes made oblique references to Southeastern Africa by claiming relationships with each other within Spanish colonial institutions. In Mexico City, Juan Bartolo told a priest that he had maintained a friendship with another enslaved man "from the time

he was a young boy ... in Mozambique where they are from". The two traveled "to China by boat" and then on to Mexico around 1588 (Mexican National Archive, I.V. 1356 exp. 12). Such a rare friendship must have meant a great deal to both men as they were trafficked halfway around the world. A handful of these remarkable stories persist in fragments throughout the archives of the former Iberian empires. My first task while in Leiden is analyzing these fragments in order to draw out as much meaning from them as possible. People of East African origin or descent in Mexico had little opportunity to describe their homelands in the historical record. My research must reckon with those gaps in our historical knowledge and contextualize the clues East Africans left to their experiences of an interconnected world.

Norah Gharala,  
University of Houston, Texas, USA

## 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 of the Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme (CEM-FMSH), in Paris, France, immediately after your stay in Leiden.

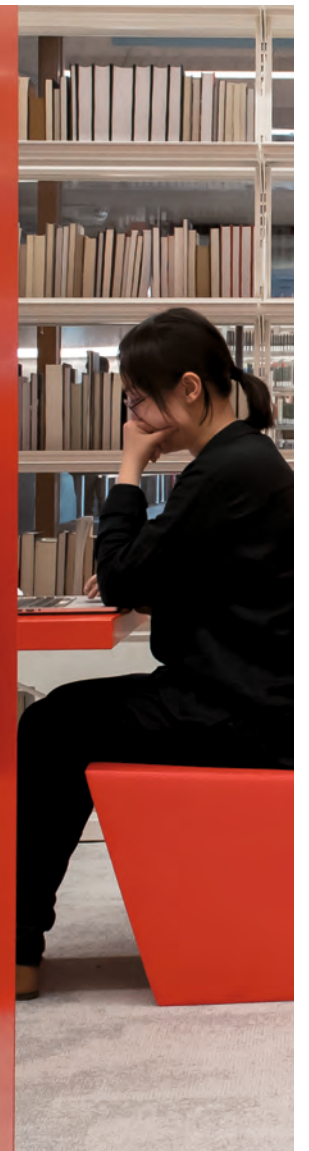
The next application deadline is 1 October 2021.



### 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.

The next deadline is tentatively set for 1 September 2021. Please check the website for the latest information.



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