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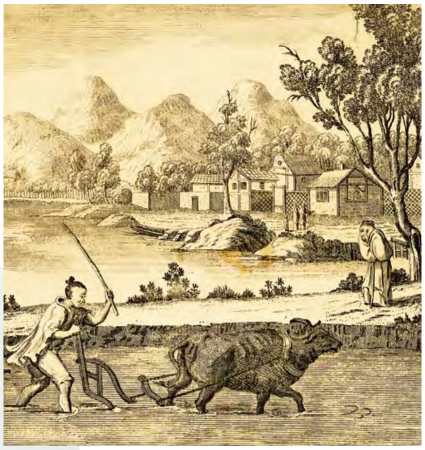
NO. 97

The Newsletter



The Study

Framing "China" through British Landscape Prints

The Focus

Road Horizons in the Himalayas

The Network

IIAS' 30th Anniversary Open Day

International
Institute for
Asian Studies

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In this edition of The Focus

Road Horizons in the Himalaya

Stéphane Gros

Well-trodden trails crisscross the Himalayas, where many diverse communities have long been brokers across economic, political, and religious spheres. These pathways were a necessity of life and led them through many mountain passes, opening to expansive views of the peaks and valleys below. As the necessities of life change drastically with new demands for increased connectivity, to what new horizons do the asphalted roads open?

To varying degrees, forms of globalisation and the circulation of goods, people, and ideas largely predate modern technologies. Nevertheless, road narratives insist on promises for a better future, considering roads as a path towards modernity, development, and proper integration.

In this Focus, we look at roads broadly speaking as they epitomise the diverse pathways through and around which people devise their own sense of belonging and becoming. The articles assembled, presented initially for the conference "Himalayan Journeys," are ethnographically informed case studies about people's mobile engagement with their social and physical landscape. Trails or roads, well-travelled or in progress, are here considered "pathways of sociality," sites for exchange that convey human relationships and values, as well as sites of expectations, cooperation, and competition. Roads exemplify ambivalent successes and failures; some become dead ends literally and metaphorically, while others remain full of promise.

Left and Cover image: Mountain pass over the Gaoligong range going into the Dulong valley, Northwest Yunnan. September 1999. (Photo S. Gros)

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 multisectoral approach to the study of Asia and actively involves scholars and experts from different disciplines and regions in its activities. Our current thematic research clusters are Asian Heritages, Asian Cities, and Global Asia.

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

On The Network pages

On pp. 46-47, Thomas Voorter, Communications Coordinator and Web Manager at IIAS, presents a series of data and visualizations detailing the ever-expanding reach of IIAS and its various platforms. Following this, p. 48 offers a photographic recap of the October 12-13 events held here in Leiden to celebrate the 30th anniversary of our institute. Page 49 showcases the latest publication in our "Asian Heritage" book series, via an article from Penny Van Esterik, author of *Designs on Pots: Ban Chiang and the Politics of Heritage in Thailand*. IIAS Fellowships are featured on p. 50, where Soheb Niazi reflects on an academic exchange between IIAS and the University of Turin. Information on our research programs can be found on pp. 54-55.

One of the newest research programs being initiated at the institute is the River Cities Network (RCN). This issue includes two contributions from that group: first, a retrospective about the September 2023 In Situ Graduate School held in Padua (p. 51); and second, a two-page spread highlighting the RCN's first in-person gathering in Thailand (pp. 52-53).

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

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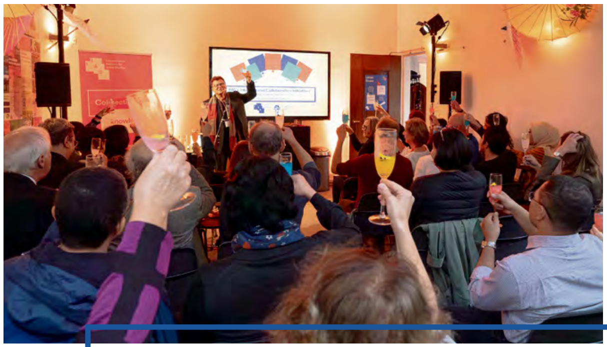

Fig. 1 (left): Director Philippe Peycam leads a toast to celebrate 30 years of IIAS, October 13, 2023. For a recap of our 30-year celebrations, see p. 48.

A Year of Celebrations

On *The Newsletter* and New Beginnings

Paramita Paul and Benjamin Linder

In October 2023, the International Institute for Asian Studies celebrated its 30-year anniversary. Our previous edition of *The Newsletter* (#96, Fall 2023) was a special issue comprising a diverse collection of stories about this institute – its past, its present, and more importantly, its future. The publication of that issue coincided with two days of events organized by our institute here in Leiden, meant to inaugurate nearly a full year of celebrations commemorating three decades of IIAS. The culmination will be ICAS 13, our flagship conference-festival (ConFest) to be held in Surabaya, Indonesia from July 28-August 1, 2024. This, too, will be accompanied by a bespoke edition of *The Newsletter* (#98, Summer 2024) with a particular emphasis on "Crossways of Knowledge," the overall theme of our ConFest. Where, then, does that leave the current issue you are reading (#97, Spring 2024), sandwiched as it is between two special issues amidst the 30-year celebrations? Along with the two editions that bookend it, this issue exemplifies both the continuities and transformations that our editorial team brings to *The Newsletter*.

On p. 48, readers will find a retrospective photo collage looking back at the two events IIAS hosted for its 30-year celebration. On October 12, 2023, at the beautiful Stadsgehoorzaal in Leiden, the institute gathered an interdisciplinary and international group of colleagues for a public roundtable discussion: "Decolonizing Area Studies: An Open Conversation." The productive roundtable, over the course of two rounds, sought to rethink the challenges and possibilities for Area Studies – as an institutionalized discipline, but also as a mode of inquiry – for the dramatic geopolitical and sociocultural shifts facing our contemporary moment. The following day, October 13, marked the exact anniversary of IIAS' inaugural celebration in 1993. To mark the occasion, we hosted an Open Day at our office on the Rapenburg canal. The event welcomed the university scholars, students, and the Leiden community for a day of cultural performances, interactive workshops, and delicious foods – from boba tea to gourmet *pani puri*, from traditional Bengali songs to Filipino dancing, from yoga sessions to lithography workshops.

Such celebrations are not only an opportunity to reflect on the past, but also to take stock of the present. One heartening and exciting dimension of the October events was the presence of so many partners from across the world. This included colleagues from Tanzania, Zambia, and Senegal, with whom IIAS works on the network-building platform *Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge*. It also included partners from the recently established Airlangga Institute for Indian Ocean Crossroads (AIIOC) at Airlangga University, who are hosting and co-organizing ICAS 13 in Surabaya. These are only a few examples. On pp. 56-47 of this issue, Thomas Voorter, Communications Coordinator and Web Manager at IIAS, presents a variety of data visualizations demonstrating the wide and ever-expanding reach of IIAS and its global connections.

At its core, *The Newsletter* remains a platform primarily dedicated to dissemination of diverse research and critical ideas, and this issue is no exception. Both "The Focus" and "The Tone" offer research from the Himalayas. In the former, guest editor Stéphane Gros curates a wonderful collection of articles around the theme of roads and infrastructure across the region (pp. 28-41). In the latter, Anna Stirr highlights the work of her and her colleagues as they document and publicize various modes of musical performance in Nepal (pp. 44-45).

We are also extremely proud of this iteration of "The Study," which includes articles on everything from Cold War-era visits of Africans to North Korea (pp. 6-7) to the divergent framings of Chinese landscapes in colonial-era paintings (pp. 10-11), from the written correspondence between anthropologist Bernard Cohn and historian Ranajit Guha (pp. 6-7) to the struggle for cultural preservation and heritage among the Oroqen people of Inner Mongolia (pp. 16-17), from digital reconstructions of a 5th-century pagoda-temple (pp. 14-15) to a study of temple tanks in Varanasi (pp. 8-9). Always seeking to respond to contemporary political events, we also invited a contribution exploring the legal dimension of recent anti-Muslim violence in India (pp. 12-13). Taken together, the collection of research articles highlights the admirable diversity of Asian Studies research and the sustained importance of bringing such work to a wide readership, reaching audiences within and beyond academia.

Since our editorial team came on board in 2021, we have implemented a suite of new projects at *The Newsletter*. This has included new and revamped sections of the print edition as well as new digital platforms. In this edition, too, we continue to expand the scope of the publication. "The Region" section includes contributions from two familiar guest editors: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore (pp. 22-24) and Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC) in South Korea (pp. 25-27). However, in addition, readers will notice two new partners contributing to that section as well, both from places with emergent, or often overlooked, Asian Studies scholarship. On pp. 18-20, Brazilian colleagues present several translated (from the original Portuguese) summaries of recent articles that appeared in the journal *Afro-Ásia*. Increasingly, we are interested in pursuing the possibilities of translation in our pages, once again seeking to amplify research from beyond the Anglophone academy. Meanwhile, on p. 21, Kostas Tsimonis reflects on the current state of Asian Studies in Greece. In both Brazil and Greece, the academic study of Asia – and, indeed, "Asia" itself – looks quite different from elsewhere, and we are pleased to bring such perspectives into our pages.

Finally, readers will notice a slight but key change to the back cover of this issue. Instead of the typical "Available for Review" page, we have implemented a new one-page section entitled "The Imprint." Moving forward, this new page will highlight the critical work of small publishers around the world. Such presses, often located beyond the Global North, produce some of the most innovative, incisive, locally informed, and high-quality books within and beyond Asian Studies. All too often, the global publishing houses and major university presses – those with resources to invest in promotion – receive an outsized share of attention. Frankly, even despite our best efforts, this problem also beset the "Available for Review" page that The Imprint replaces. Whether works of research, translation, literature, or art, the publishers on The Imprint regularly experiment to push against the conventions of academic and popular trade publishing. In this first edition, we are pleased to highlight a selection of recent titles from Gantala Press in the Philippines.

We hope readers enjoy the varied content of this issue. As always, we remain open to your proposals for the print issue of *The Newsletter* and its digital platforms. Pitch your ideas and submit your articles to the editorial team at thenewsletter@iias.nl.

Paramita Paul,
Chief Editor of *The Newsletter*

Benjamin Linder,
Assistant Editor of *The Newsletter*

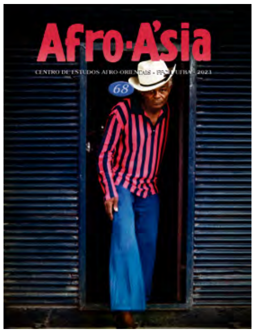

Fig. 2 (left): *Afro-Ásia* journal cover, n. 68, 2023. For an introduction to *Afro-Ásia*, see pp. 18-20. (Photo courtesy of *Afro-Ásia*)

Fig. 3 (above): Road in Eastern Tibet Khams region. The Focus section on roadways in the Himalayas can be found on pp. 28-41. (Photo by Stéphane Gros, 2004)

Pyongyang as a Crossroads for Afro-Asian Cooperation

Tycho van der Hoog

Contrary to popular perceptions of North Korea as a hermit kingdom, its capital city used to be a hotspot for international travel. During the Cold War an eclectic mix of politicians, soldiers, journalists, and students travelled to Pyongyang for conferences, meetings, and training courses. Of particular importance was the stream of African visitors to North Korea, a largely overlooked but nonetheless important phenomenon in the history of the Global South. The connections that were forged between Africans and North Koreans were part of a larger framework of Afro-Asian cooperation that sought to change the global order.

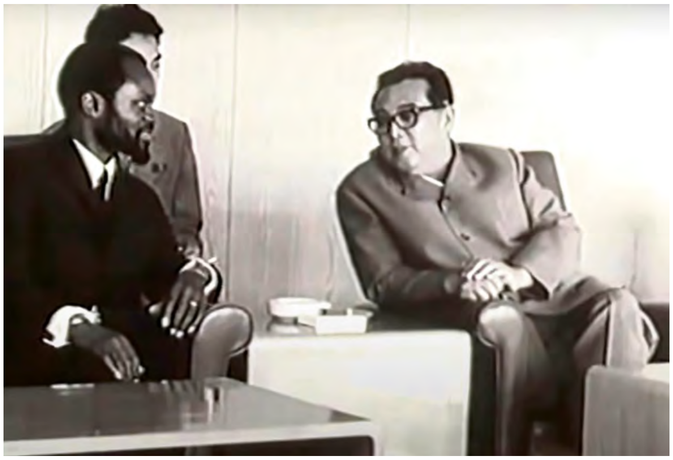

Fig. 1 (above): Kim Il Sung receives Samora Machel, 1971. (Still from the documentary *President Kim Il Sung Met Foreign Heads of State and Prominent Figures April 1970-December 1975*).

While North Korea's past was largely shaped by war, its future will be shaped through diplomacy. Following the end of Japanese occupation in 1945, the Korean peninsula was divided between the Soviet Union and the United States. In 1948, two separate governments were established, and from that moment on the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) were embroiled in a fierce struggle for legitimacy. Tensions between the two Koreas culminated when North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950. For three years, the peninsula was ravaged by terribly destructive violence, until an uneasy armistice commenced. The Korean War had a profound impact on North Korea, and in particular on Pyongyang.

A diplomatic hub

During the Korean War, Pyongyang was effectively razed to the ground, a human tragedy that simultaneously provided North Korea's city planners a tabula rasa to construct an entirely new city. Pyongyang became a canvas for North Korea's vision of a new society.[1] It embodied the impressive post-war reconstruction of the North Korean nation, which initially outperformed the rival South Korea in terms of economic growth. The city was more than a place where people lived; it was a platform for the performances of the North Korean theatre state.[2] Kim Il Sung (1912-1994) charted the country's foreign policy through the adoption of Juche, an indigenous philosophy that emphasized North Korea's independence from China and the Soviet Union.[3]

Through skilful diplomacy, North Korea became an important player in a rapidly decolonizing world. It was a time of turmoil and revolution, and politicians from Africa and Asia joined hands in an attempt to devise an alternative world order.[4] Pyongyang was a crucial node in the rapidly developing Afro-Asian world. The city hosted meetings of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation, two organisations that embodied the rise of South-South cooperation. As such, Pyongyang became a crossroads of different cultures. Visitors from all over the world came to the capital and were impressed by its sights. Among them were many delegations from Africa.

The African continent was crucial for North Korean foreign policy. Many recently independent governments or liberation movements fighting for freedom were receptive to Kim Il Sung's anti-imperialist message.[5] A defected North Korean diplomat with working experience in Africa told me that Kim poured a lot of effort into understanding and navigating African affairs.[6] In order to establish fraternal relations, North Korea invested in cultural diplomacy. Examples are the translation of North Korean books and magazines into African languages, the dissemination of film and photographs, and travel opportunities.[7] As such, Pyongyang became a tool in Kim's Africa policy. North Korea utilized an "invitation diplomacy" in which influential Africans were brought to Pyongyang to experience the wonders of Juche.[8] The city exemplified North Korea's role as a model for the developing world.[9] To this end, African guests were treated to elaborate tours around the city, festive banquets, and other types of honours.

African presidential visits

The most high-profile African visitors to North Korea were political leaders.[10] Occasionally, African leaders were invited for specific conferences, for example workshops or summits from the Non-Aligned Movement or the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation. Most important, however, were bilateral invitations. Influential leaders from across the continent were encouraged to come and meet Kim Il Sung. North Korean diplomats even travelled to the former president Mobutu Sese Seko's (1930-1997) holiday address in Belgium to hand-deliver an invitation, after they failed to reach him back home in Zaire.[11] African leaders were usually accompanied by large entourages of ministers, army leaders, and party officials. They often enjoyed these visits and returned

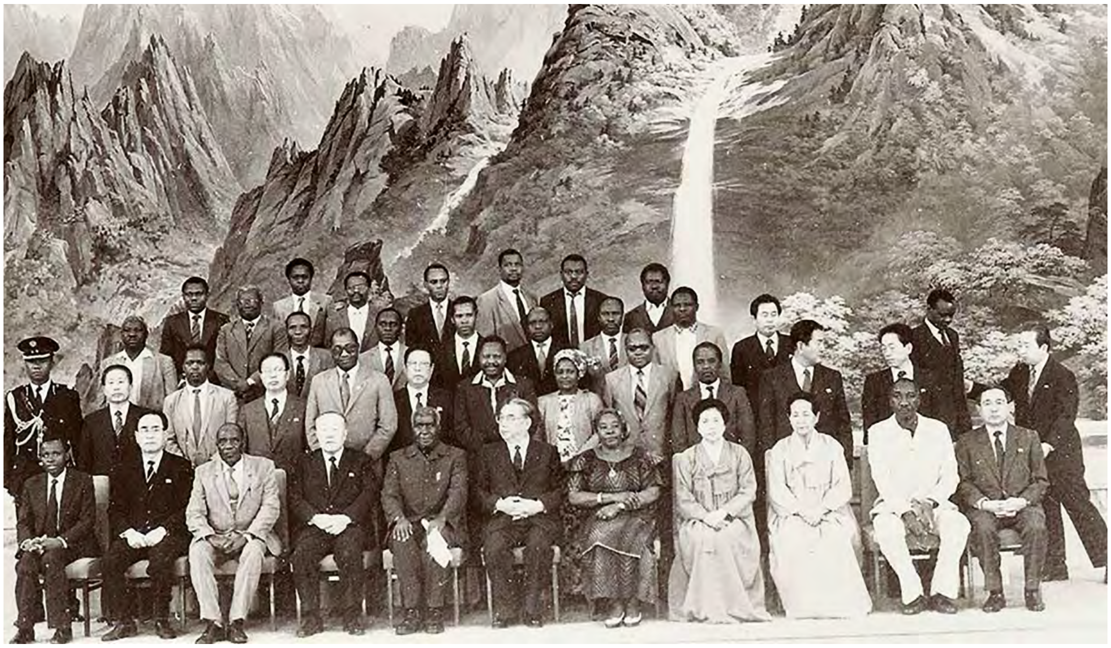

Fig. 2 (right): Zambian delegation in Pyongyang, 1987. (Photo from North Korean state media)

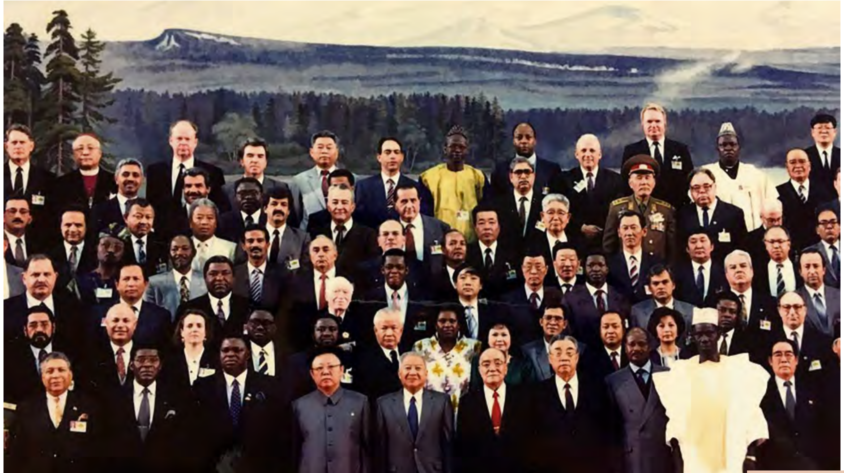

Fig. 3 (top): The 80th anniversary party of Kim Il Sung, 1992. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons and Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional)

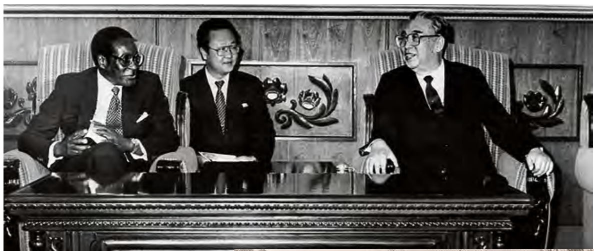

Fig. 4 (middle left): Kim Il Sung receives Robert Mugabe, 1993. (Photo from North Korean state media).

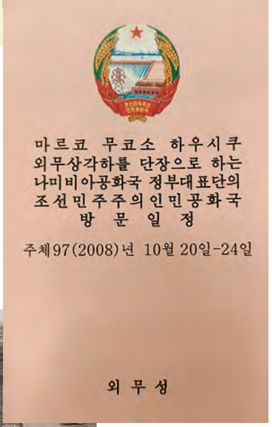

Fig. 5 (middle right): North Korean program of a Namibian visit to Pyongyang, 2008. (Photo by the author, 2022)

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외무상각하를 단장으로 하는
나미비아공화국 정부대표단의
조선민주주의인민공화국
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주체97(2008)년 10월 20일-24일

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Fig. 6 (below): Namibian delegation in Pyongyang, 2008. (Original photo from North Korean state media, image made by author, 2022)

several times. An example is Kenneth Kaunda (1924-2021), the president of Zambia, who visited Pyongyang multiple times in the 1980s. Kaunda appeared to be "an admirer of the North Korean system," and Zambian officials were "genuinely impressed" by North Korea's development.[12]

The meetings with Kim Il Sung were used to discuss political cooperation, cultural exchanges, and perhaps most importantly, military support. Kim offered training and weapons to several African liberation movements and governments. "I was taught how to load, unload, and clean weapons," recalled Yoweri Museveni (b. 1944) in his autobiography about his first trip to North Korea in 1969. "It was the first time I had ever handled a weapon." A few years later, Museveni overthrew the regime of Milton Obote (1925-2005) and became president of Uganda. He remains president today, and Uganda subsequently became a significant military ally of North Korea. This story illustrates the importance of the connections that were fostered in Pyongyang many years ago. Personal relations were developed into strong bilateral relations that proved to be profitable to both African and North Korean regimes.[13]

Not only presidents travelled to Pyongyang; their children did as well. In 1979, the first president of Equatorial Guinea, Francisco Macías Nguema (1924-1979), sent his wife and children to North Korea. Shortly thereafter, Macías was deposed in a coup and executed. His family remained in Pyongyang, effectively living in exile under the guardianship of Kim Il Sung. This extraordinary story is described by Nguema's daughter, Mónica, who left North Korea in 1994 and published two memoirs in Korean and English.[14] She was enrolled in military boarding school and became fluent in Korean. Among her friends were two other presidential children: the sons of Matthieu Kérékou (1933-2015), the president of Benin. A central theme in her memoirs is the environment of central Pyongyang, which shaped her experiences. Mónica describes daily life in the city centre, the awe-inspiring government buildings, dancing to the music of Madonna in a discotheque in central Pyongyang with diplomats, defected American soldiers, and other foreign students.

Learning the lessons of North Korea

Mónica Macías' story is an rare insight into the lives of African students in Pyongyang, of which there were many. Aliou Niane, a Guinean student in North Korea between 1982-1987, revealed in an interview that he encountered students from Ethiopia, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Tanzania, Togo, and Zambia. Niane arrived in North Korea after his president, Ahmed Sékou Touré (1922-1984), visited Kim Il Sung's 70th birthday party in Pyongyang and was offered ten scholarships for promising Guinean youth. Niane was one of them.[15] Unfortunately, there seem to be very few memoirs or other egodocuments describing these experiences.

By mere chance, I found a collection of North Korean journals in a Namibian archive that contain travel descriptions from African visitors in Pyongyang. The *Study of the Juche Idea* journal solicited travelogues from non-Korean authors across the world. Francisco Barreto, a member of the Guinea-Bissau-Korea Friendship Association, described the "soaring sky-high" Tower of the Juche Idea, a 170-metre high monument in Pyongyang. "I could hardly take my eyes from the sculpture." Foreign visitors were always taken on tours around the city to inspect monuments, schools, hospitals, farms, and other places of interest in and around Pyongyang. "My heart stirred with boundless emotion and excitement," wrote the Togolese philosopher Sossah Kounoutcho, "I was fascinated by the beauty of the city." Kounoutcho also recollected seeing Francisco Macías Nguema, the president of Equatorial Guinea and father of Mónica.

The authors of the *Study of the Juche Idea* went to Pyongyang to learn the lessons of Juche for their respective home countries. Oumar Kanoute, a party official from Mali, expressed awe at the reconstruction of North Korea after the destruction of the Korean War. This was an example to Mali, a country "also determined to build an independent national economy" whilst overcoming "obstacles and difficulties."[16] The contributions to *Study of the Juche Idea* are full of praise of Pyongyang and its inhabitants. These articles are essentially hagiographies of Kim Il Sung and unfortunately contain little reflection on the real-life travel experiences of the authors.

Conclusion

When the Cold War came to an end, North Korea was plunged into a crisis. Economic mayhem, a large-scale famine, and the death of Kim Il Sung changed the North Korean state. It no longer had the funds to support its soft power programs in Africa. Rather than spending money, North Korea was fixated on earning money to ensure regime survival. As a consequence, the days of Pyongyang operating as a hub for Afro-Asian solidarity were over. Nevertheless, African-North Korean exchanges continued on a different path. Occasionally, news bulletins about African visitors in Pyongyang appear in North Korean state media. The focus of such exchanges is now, however, on the sale of North Korean arms, technology, and labour.

Popular perceptions of North Korea are influenced by myths and mysteries. One of the most persistent ideas is that of North Korea as a state that operates in isolation, cut-off from the rest of the world. While there is some truth to this statement – e.g., ordinary North Koreans cannot travel freely – it overlooks the importance of Pyongyang as a destination for African delegations, and as a meeting space for the non-aligned world. Whether informed by solidarity or pragmatism, or a combination of both, these exchanges challenge the widespread image of North Korea as a reclusive kingdom.

Tycho van der Hoog is an assistant professor at the Netherlands Defence Academy and a PhD candidate at the African Studies Centre of Leiden University. Email: ta.vd.hoog@mindef.nl

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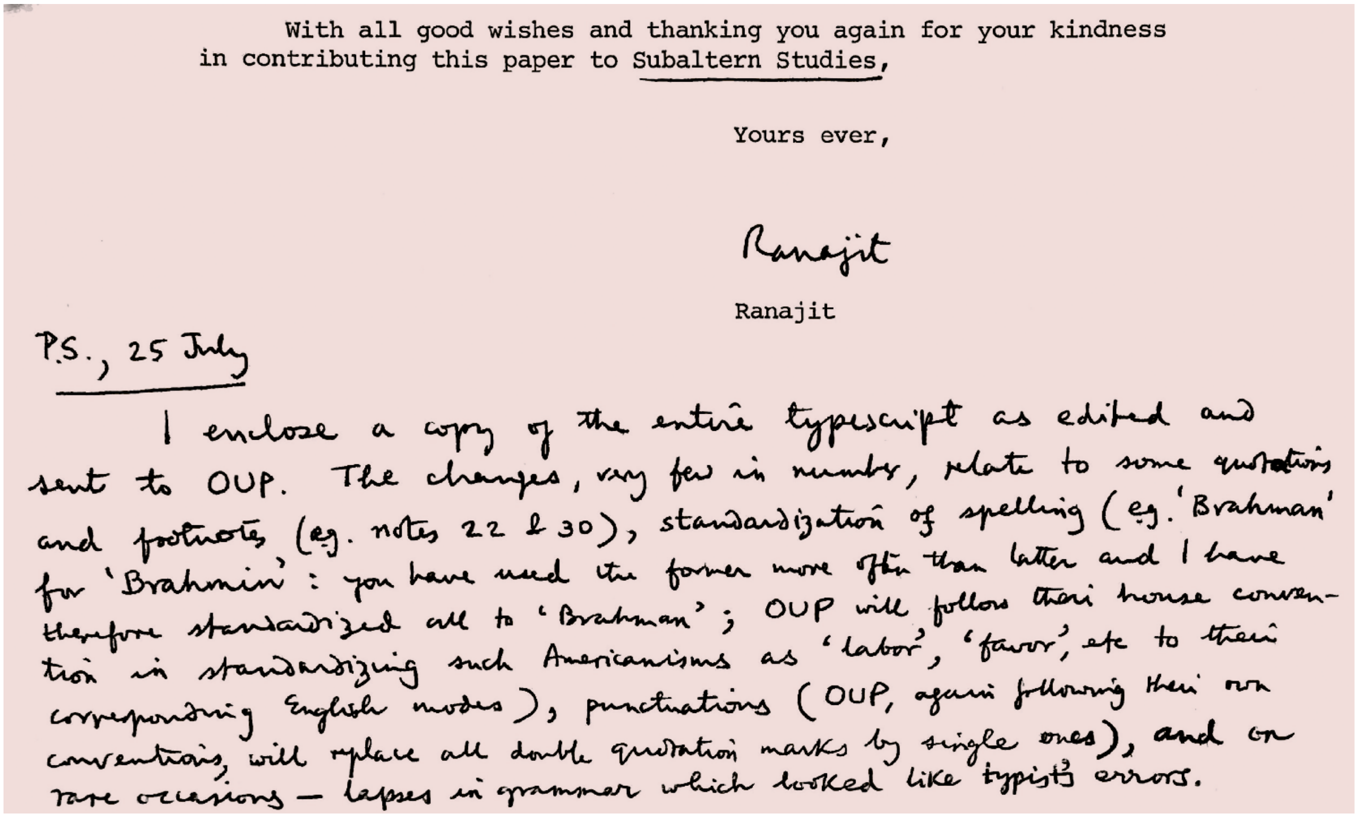
15 Free Korea, "Memories of an African Student Forced to Study in North Korea During the 1980s," May 28, 2009, https://freekorea.us/2009/05/memories-of-an-african-student-forced-to-study-in-north-korea-during-the-1980s
16 University of Namibia Archives, PA4/5/421, Study of the Juche Idea: 1979-1990.



With all good wishes and thanking you again for your kindness in contributing this paper to Subaltern Studies,

Yours ever,

Ranajit

Ranajit

P.S., 25 July

I enclose a copy of the entire typescript as edited and sent to OUP. The changes, very few in number, relate to some quotations and footnotes (eg. notes 22 & 30), standardization of spelling (eg. 'Brahman' for 'Brahmin': you have used the former more often than latter and I have therefore standardized all to 'Brahman'; OUP will follow their house convention in standardizing such Americanisms as 'labor', 'favor', etc to their corresponding English modes), punctuations (OUP, again following their own conventions, will replace all double quotation marks by single ones), and on rare occasions – lapses in grammar which looked like typist's errors.

Fig. 1 (above): Handwritten postscript to a letter written from Ranajit Guha to Bernard Cohn. (Courtesy of the Joseph Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago)

Prequel to an Introduction: Ranajit Writes to Barney

Titas De Sarkar

The passing of Ranajit Guha on April 28, 2023 has led to a variety of discussions not only on the life and works of Guha but also on his location among a global community of academicians in the twentieth century. Some of the striking aspects of Guha's intellectual career were his interest in questions that transcended disciplines; his method, which required a broader understanding of what constitutes the writing of history; and his collaborations with fellow scholars from distant parts of the world. This intellectual cosmopolitanism of Guha is reflected in the diverse places and individuals with whom Guha interacted and worked in his lifetime. Born in what was then East Bengal (now in Bangladesh), Guha grew up in Calcutta, spending long stretches of time in Manchester and Sussex before moving to Canberra and then finally settling down in Vienna.[1] In the course of his career and travels, Guha came into contact with some of the most influential minds of his time. One such scholar was the eminent anthropologist Bernard S. Cohn.

Bernard Cohn (1928-2003) spent most of his career at the Department of Anthropology in the University of Chicago. Famous for works such as *India: A Social Anthropology of a Civilization* (1971) and *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (1996), Cohn's method too was distinctively interdisciplinary. It is then of no surprise that Ranajit Guha and Bernard Cohn formed a longstanding intellectual friendship, one that led to significant contributions in the study of Indian societies. Ranajit Guha's appreciation for Bernard Cohn is, of course, evident from the former's introduction to Cohn's 1987 collection of writings in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press).[2] However, a little-known collection of letters written by Guha to Cohn in the 1980s – presently held by the Joseph Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago – lends deeper understanding on a significant time of academic collaboration, interpersonal collegiality, and anxieties of meeting publishing deadlines in the days before the internet. The 80s were a particularly interesting time for both Guha and Cohn. While Guha launched the much-feted Subaltern Studies school during this time, a closer look at the Bernard Cohn papers (also at the University of Chicago Library) would suggest that Cohn was writing papers such as "History and Anthropology: Towards a Rapprochement?" in 1980. The letters mark this transitory moment in the lives of both scholars.

The first of the seven letters, written on 24 November 1981, carries Guha's signature flair as he starts: "I apologise for not replying earlier to your very kind (though belated in its own turn) letter." Two events from Guha's intellectual life form the core of the letter. First, an upbeat Guha informs Cohn that he has sent the final manuscript of *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* to Oxford University Press and does not see himself writing such a lengthy work in the foreseeable future. Significantly, to Guha, this project was more a way of opening up the field rather than of having the last word on it. He says that he wished to follow this monograph with essays that would continue to focus on "the problem of power in peasant insurgency." Second, he mentions life at the Australian National University (ANU), where he was researching and teaching at that time. Apart from the anthropologist Roger Keesing, Guha was mostly disappointed by the academic output from departments such as History, Political Science, Economics ("Stone-Age mentality"), and international relations. However, he was almost ecstatic in his appreciation for the working conditions at the university. The university, he writes, provided him with a great opportunity to focus on his research and writing.

Guha writes the next letter on 1 April 1982, after returning from India following the publication of the first volume of *Subaltern Studies*. Content with the discussion that the volume had generated (despite criticisms from the "neo-colonialist and left-nationalist" circles), Guha invited Cohn to a conference on "The Subaltern in South Asian History" to be held at ANU on 26-28 November, 1982. Cohn's popularity among the young subalterns was evident: "I expect there will be a stampede among people offering to put you up." Guha left it to Cohn to grace the occasion in any capacity that the latter saw fit. The letter also highlights Guha's involvement with the work of the young scholars. Guha, of course, is famous for mentoring and collaborating with a group of researchers back in the 1980s. Many of them – Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Shahid Amin, to name a few[3] - went on to have spectacular career trajectories and have made striking contributions to our understanding of history, political theory, and everyday society. Guha's excitement with the range of work coming out of Calcutta and Delhi, and with the "general level of sophistication" among many researchers in their early 30s, is palpable in its effusiveness.

The next letter from the archive comes two years later, written on 27 April 1984, at a time when *Subaltern Studies III* was about to be published. Performing the role of an editor, Guha requests Cohn to contribute to *Subaltern Studies IV* and submit his chapter by the end of August. The immense faith that Guha placed in Cohn's academic prowess is evident from his readiness to send Cohn's chapter to the editors without any revision. He writes that "on no account shall I agree to the publication of this volume without a contribution under your signature." As we know by now, this would turn out to be Cohn's much celebrated article, "The Command of Language and the Language of Command."

The letter that Guha writes to Cohn on 14 June 1985 is primarily concerned with the perpetual precarity of an academic career. Planning his life after retirement from ANU, Guha is of two minds: on the one hand, he considers applying to US institutions that Cohn has suggested; on the other hand, he entertains the possibilities of an extended stay at ANU. Meanwhile, he has read and admired Cohn's article "The Peoples of India," which he says "bristles with ideas." An agitated Guha sends the next letter on 24 July 1985, mentioning how he was "suffering from editor's nerves" but has nonetheless enjoyed Cohn's article for *Subaltern Studies IV* (the publication of which was clearly delayed by a few months since the April '84 letter). Describing it as "nearly perfect," Guha acknowledges the lucidity of the argument and the handling of the evidence, going so far as to claim that nothing like it exists in the literature on modern Indian history. Guha was evidently agitated less about the quality of writing than he was about the logistics of mediating between the authors and publishers. A chance visit by the famous historian Sumit Sarkar to Canberra at that time eased his anxieties somewhat. Cohn's article was delivered to Oxford University Press through Sarkar, thus completing the elaborate US-Australia-India academic circuit. The letter ends with two paragraphs of postscript in Guha's handwriting, informing Cohn about a few formal changes he has made to the latter's article.

The next letter – from 13 March 1986 – carried with it a hint of sadness on three counts. Guha wishes Cohn's partner Rella a speedy recovery. He was also disappointed with Cohn's inability to come to India for a conference due to visa-related complications. Finally, he lamented the lack of academic focus in the conference – the second edition of the one held previously in Canberra. The many voices in the event, to him, led to little more than noise. Interestingly, Guha goes a step further and embraces the chaotic nature of such congregations. He says that it is "in the very nature of the development of our project." By this time, four volumes of *Subaltern Studies* had been published. On a fundamental level, the group aimed at making history polyphonic, accessible, and democratic. It sought to do away with privileging a particular kind of (colonial) archive and to write histories based on silenced voices of the peasants and lower castes, oral traditions, and Indigenous beliefs. Being at the helm of a school of thought based on the spirit of inclusivity, Guha possibly saw meaning in reconciling with a certain lack of structure. If decentering was one of the watchwords of the Subaltern Studies Collective, it only follows that it would not suit its followers to discipline and curate voices according to their wishes, even if it led to a certain amount of disorder.

The final letter from 2 October 1986 brings us back to the aforementioned introduction that Guha penned for Cohn's 1987 book. Visibly moved by Cohn's body of work, Guha acknowledges the challenge he faced while analyzing the scholarly contribution of someone with whom he shares much intellectual attachment. A telling paragraph on intertextuality leads Guha to deliberate on the influence of past texts in the writing of a new one. Citing Marx's unconscious "borrowing" of Hegel, Guha finds it least surprising that the same has happened with Kroeber's influence on Cohn. (Guha discusses this at length in the introduction itself.) Replacing the term 'influence' with 'catalysis,' Guha refers to a broader knowledge system whereby present and future research is always already indebted to an extant body of work that has a firm hold on their discipline of study. In any case, Guha was quite eager to see *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* in print: "please hurry up with the proofs." Simultaneously, work went on as usual for him. He shared with Cohn the progress on his latest research on the structure of politics in colonial India.

The slice of interaction between two academic giants captured in these few letters speaks of a particular time in the study of South Asia. It was a period marked by excitement at a birth of a new school, as well as by print culture consisting of telex communications and essays sent by hand for publication. It was also an era marked by intellectual camaraderie across – but not limited to – Canberra, Chicago, New Delhi, and Calcutta.[4]

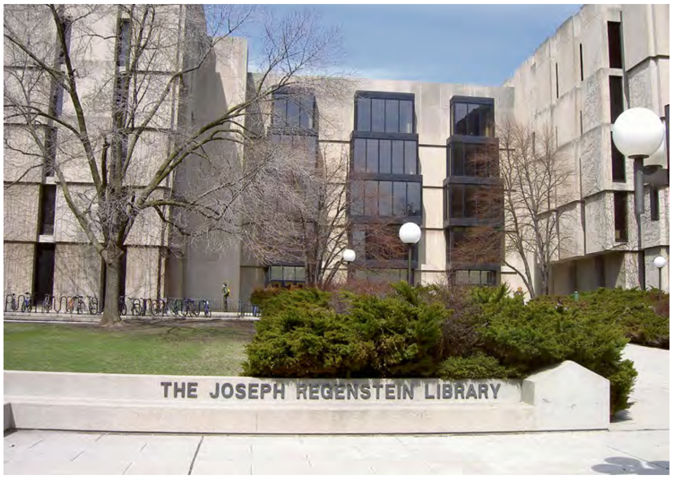


Fig. 3 (above): The Joseph Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago, which houses the correspondence between Ranajit Guha and Bernard Cohn. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons user Americanist, 2008)

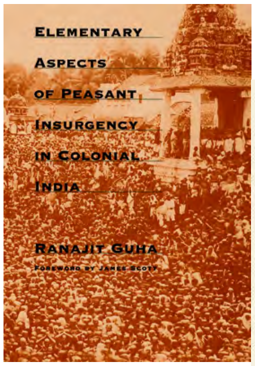


Fig. 4 (left): Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. (Cover image courtesy of Duke University Press)

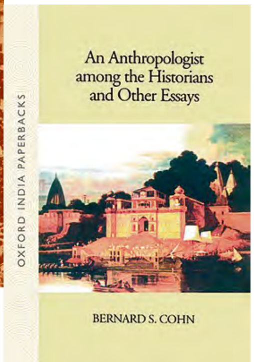
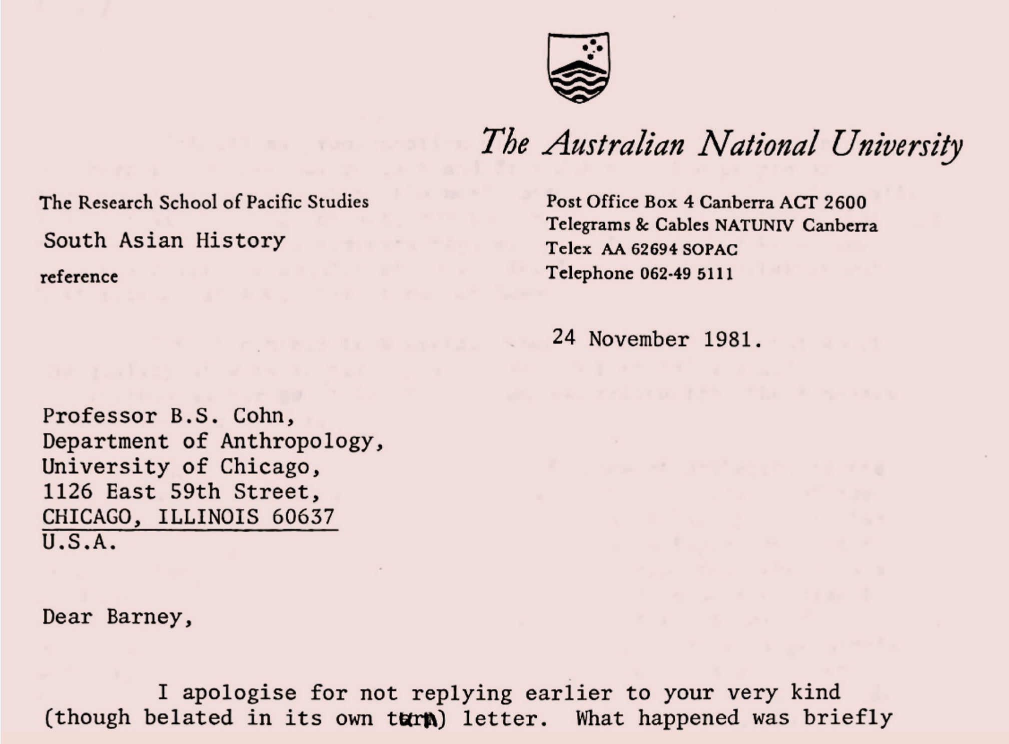


Fig. 5 (right): Bernard Cohn's *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*. (Cover image courtesy of Oxford University Press)



The Australian National University

The Research School of Pacific Studies
South Asian History
reference

Post Office Box 4 Canberra ACT 2600
Telegrams & Cables NATUNIV Canberra
Telex AA 62694 SOPAC
Telephone 062-49 5111

24 November 1981.

Professor B.S. Cohn,
Department of Anthropology,
University of Chicago,
1126 East 59th Street,
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637
U.S.A.

Dear Barney,

I apologise for not replying earlier to your very kind (though belated in its own turn) letter. What happened was briefly

Fig. 2 (above): Letter written from Ranajit Guha to Bernard Cohn in November 1981. (Courtesy of the Joseph Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago)

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Notes

[1] See https://thewire.in/history/ranajit-guha-the-unconventional-historian

[2] This introduction was later reprinted in Guha's own compendium of essays *The Small Voice of History: Collected Essays* with the altered title "Introducing an Anthropologist among the Historians" (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002).

[3] Shahid Amin's reminisces on Guha were published in *The Wire* (https://thewire.in/history/reminiscing-about-ranajit-guha), and Dipesh Chakrabarty's were published in the *Indian Express* (https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/dipesh-chakrabarty-remembering-ranajit-guha-my-guru-my-friend-8586418/)

[4] A shorter Bengali version of this article appeared in a special edition on Ranajit Guha in the journal *Alochona Chakra*. My gratitude to the guest editor of this issue Sourav Chattopadhyay for bringing my attention to the Cohn-Guha letters and to Thomas James Newbold for retrieving them from the Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

Spatial Texts of *Purāṇa-s* and Sacred Temple Tanks of Varanasi

Mahesh Madhav Gogate

For many centuries, the hydrological landscape of Varanasi was characterised by the river Ganga and its tributaries, numerous temple tanks, ponds, and catchment areas. The spatial texts of the *Purāṇa-s* provide a valuable source for understanding the sacred and fluid landscape of Varanasi before colonial powers invaded. The term 'spatial text' is created to establish a concealed understanding of the spatial dynamics of Varanasi composed in the texts of *Purāṇa-s*. This empirical exercise will further strengthen the premise of the continuity of temple tanks and temples that formed the sacred geography of this ancient city. The descriptive texts in the *Purāṇa-s* provide an additional source for reconstructing the precolonial geography of Varanasi.

Varanasi is probably one of the few ancient sacred cities on the Indian subcontinent that has been continuously visited, devotedly explored, meticulously mapped, intensely written about, and documented for more than two thousand years. In scriptures and various works of literature, the city is also referred to as *Ānandakānana* (forest of bliss), *Avimukta* (the place never forsaken by *Śiva*), *Rudravāsa* (the dwelling place of *Śiva*), *Mahāśmaśāna* (the great cremation ground), *Kāśī* (city of light/shine), Varanasi (sacred geography between the Varana and Asi rivers), and *Banaras*.[1] Situated amidst the vast and fertile plains of the river Ganga, the city has an exceptional location [Fig. 1]. The city lies on the west side of the Ganga on a natural limestone embankment with an average height of 77 metres. The alluvial deposits carried by the Ganga on its western course eventually formed a prominent natural embankment at a high level. With its celestial features, rich legendary tales, and significant geological features, the river Ganga has successfully dominated the entire floodplain and has significantly influenced many ancient and sacred cities, including Varanasi, which flourished on its banks. The waters of the Ganga not only nourish the civilisation that has developed on its vast floodplains, but the geomorphological features of the high natural embankments have created several inland ponds and streams.

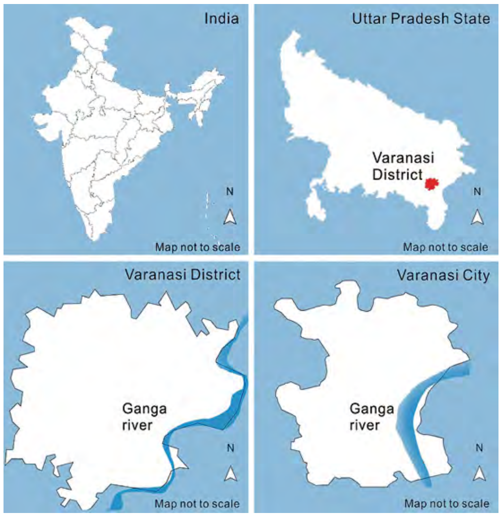


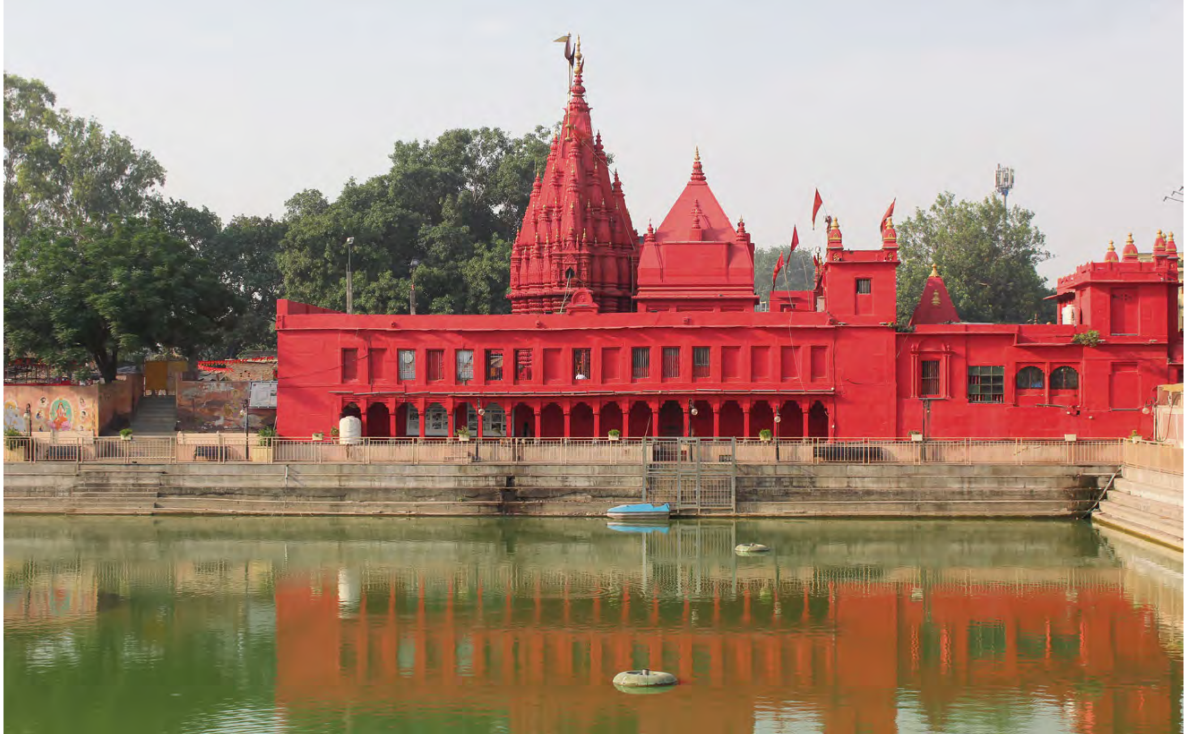
Fig. 1 (left): The geographic location of Varanasi city, India. Note: Map not to scale. (Map made by the author)

In Varanasi, in addition to these inland water bodies, the river Varana and a smaller stream (*nālā*) called Asi have a confluence with the Ganga in the north and south, respectively. This natural setting reinforces the notion that water is ubiquitous in Varanasi. The water bodies of the city are denoted as sacred temple tanks. The term 'sacred' is used explicitly in the context of a sanctified place, a place of pilgrimage, or a place close to a sacred river or a sacred reservoir of water. Instead of words such as holy, divine, and religious, the term 'sacred' is used exclusively as an epithet to develop the unique relationship of certain places closely linked to the water reservoirs, supplemented by prehistoric events, as well as stories and tales that revere the sacred geography of the place.

Temple tanks

The temple tanks denote various forms of water reservoirs, such as *kuṇḍa*, *pōkharā*, *puṣkariṇi*, *bāvali*, etc. The temple tanks are located near the temple or are part of the temple complex [Fig. 2]. As is the case

Fig. 2 (right): Durgā kuṇḍa near Durga Temple. (Photo by the author, May 2019)



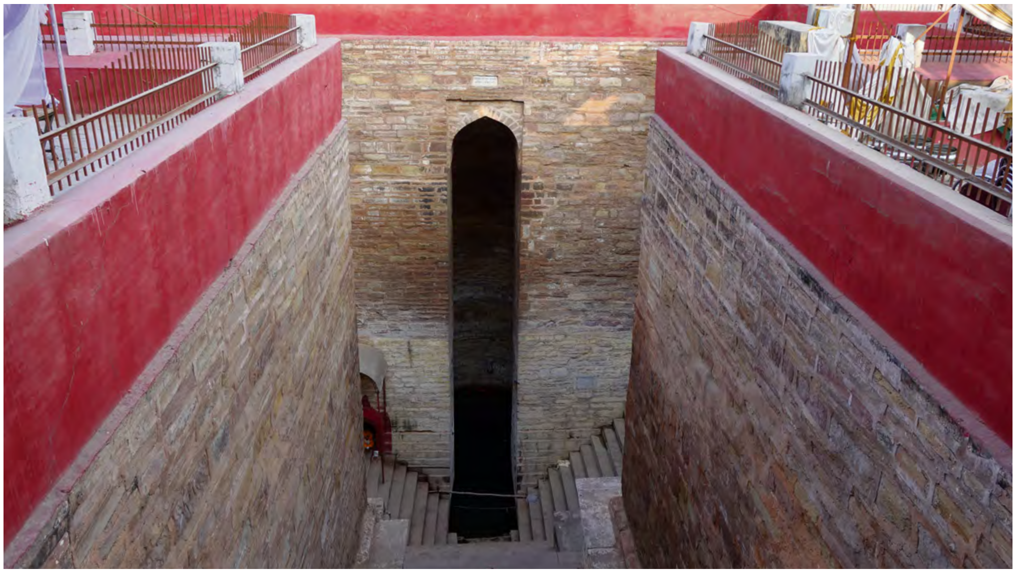


Fig. 3 (above): Lolārka kuṇḍa. (Photo by the author, February 2017)

elsewhere on the Indian subcontinent, almost all forms of water reservoir in Varanasi are closely associated with the pantheon of Hindu deities. One of the most famous wells is *Jñāna Vāpī* (Well of Wisdom), which lies to the north of the current *Kashi Vishwanath* temple complex. A variety of rituals, socio-cultural practices, fairs, and festivals are associated not only with the water reservoirs, but also with their catchment areas, which suitably encapsulate the worship of water as a purifying agent.

Twenty types of temples and their descriptions are listed in *Bṛihatsaṁhitā*, the most notable work by the renowned 6th-century Indian astronomer and polymath Varāhamihira. In the 56th chapter, it is mentioned that the site of the temple should be close to a water tank and a garden. The temple tank is typically of a square or rectangular design, with natural inlets and outlets. On all four sides, there are masonry steps leading down to the water, made of clay-baked bricks or sandstone with some ornamental features. These steps are integrated with the ramps and may or may not be bricked up to the sides of the water tanks.[2] Many of the temple tanks in Varanasi have a small well in the centre, which plays a role in the recharging of the groundwater.

In Varanasi, one can see a variety of architectural forms and patterns of the temple tanks. *Lolārka kuṇḍa*, on *Asi ghāṭa* (masonry steps leading to the river), near the banks of the river Ganga, is a unique example [Fig. 3]. This temple tank has a deep well surrounded by steep stairs leading down to the water. The circular well is surrounded by walls in the shape of a cylinder and is open at the top. There is also a small platform that is added to the series of steps. As you go down the stairs, you will see many small sculptures carved into the stones of the surrounding walls. Devotees and seekers flock to this ancient temple tank during the months of August and September to take a dip and perform the rituals. Many temple tanks also had *akhāḍā-s* (a gymnasium and wrestling arena) nearby. Regular members who practice in *akhāḍā-s* talk about the dynamic relationship *akhāḍā* has with an adjoining temple and temple tank. The active members, mostly older men, tell stories of bathing in the tanks or ponds of the neighbouring temples and equate it with taking a dip in the river Ganga. During my fieldwork, regular members often told me that it is the water of the river Ganga that flows into these various temple tanks and ponds, and therefore bathing in these water tanks is also sacred.

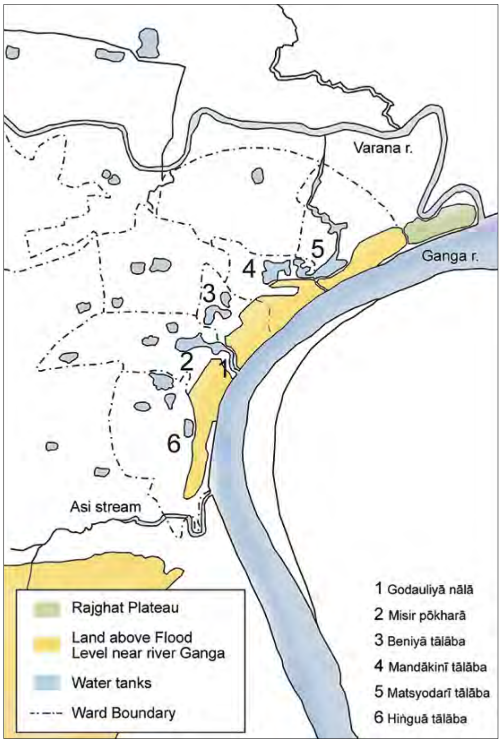


Fig. 4 (left): Drainage pattern and geographical features of Varanasi. (Image traced and edited by the author, based on a map in R. L. Singh, *Banaras: A Study in Urban Geography* [Nand Kishore, 1955])

Spatial texts of *Purāṇa-s*

Purāṇa-s are part of the *Smṛtiḥ* texts and are considered an important branch of Hindu literature. One way of describing this vast literature is as an 'encyclopaedia' of stories from the ancient past. *Purāṇa-s* exist from the ancient period, and their main function is to explain and augment the Vedaḥ. The total number of *Purāṇa-s* is 18, and they contain lucid descriptions of mountains, rivers, and sacred pilgrimage sites throughout the Indian subcontinent, which are considered an essential source for the study of historical geography.[3] All 18 *Purāṇa-s* have a reference to Varanasi, stories narrating its origin and celestial features. Among all of these *Purāṇa-s*, geography covered and discussed in the *Bhuvanakośa*[4] section of *Skanda Purāṇa* arguably outranks the other texts.[5] The dates of composition of the *Purāṇa-s* have been variously claimed. The oldest manuscript of the *Skanda Purāṇa* was dated around the 6th century CE. In particular, the spatial texts shed light on the fluid landscape of Varanasi in ancient times and the pre-colonial period. The spatial text of these sections and pilgrimage digests about Varanasi describe an elevated land and a moderate slope, surrounded by streams and bodies of water with different take prototypes [Fig. 4].

Skanda Purāṇa comprises seven chapters *(khaṇḍa)*, and among the seven chapters, chapter four split into two sections are titled *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*. *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* is part of the extensive *'Sthāna Māhātmya'* literature and is a valuable source for the understanding of the various strata and composition of the ancient city of Varanasi. *Sthāna* means place, and *Māhātmya* is a body of literature that tells of the greatness and virtues of the deities and temples associated with that sacred natural place. The qualitative description of Varanasi in the chapters of *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* subtly interweaves the celestial and terrestrial features of the city, which is constantly shaped and transformed by its unique elevated location, surrounding rivers and streams, and inland temple tanks.

This natural phenomenon of high elevation appears in an allegorical way in the spatial text of *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*. Some of the verses describe Varanasi as a renowned place that is on the earth but not on the ground.[6] Varanasi is celestial and is placed on the tip of the trident of Śiva and did not inundate even during the deluge. These three tips of the trident are the three embankments, – commonly referred to as three divisions *(khaṇḍa)* – of the city, namely *Omkāra khaṇḍa* in the north, *Viśveśvara khaṇḍa* in the middle and *Kedāra khaṇḍa* in the south.[7]

The texts describe the spatial characteristics and the location of the temples that correspond to the temple tanks in the vicinity, and they construct a map for the reader to navigate and make a circumambulation around the specific temples. The *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* extensively lists the names of temples, the rituals to be performed, and the sacred bathing in the temple tanks. Such tanks are an integral architectural structure of the temple complex. The descriptions and locations of more than 281 temple tanks are given in the two sections of *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*. The spatial text describes the structural features, curative properties of the water, geographical location and settings, etymology, and the activities that are closely connected with the temple tanks. Particular temple tanks are often cited in the context of their supremacy, virtuous qualities, merits, and blessings associated with the ablution ritual. Despite constant natural and human intervention, all three of these sacred temple tanks are still active and surviving water structures.

Concluding remarks

The spatial texts recognise the centrality of the free-flowing water in its various forms and how it preserves the sanctity of the place. The spatial texts are revisited to comprehend the natural environs of the city. Varana and Asi – two streams joining the celestial river Ganga and numerous inland temple tanks – continuously play with the environs and coalesce to form the sacred landscape. The repository of numerous fluid water bodies and their description establishes the constant flow of water and how the superfluous water was swimmingly incorporated into the physical settings. *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* has numerous expressions; it continuously invokes the intrinsic the city's relationship with water and reiterates that 'water sensitivity' is the fountainhead of the entire script. The descriptive text reveals the footprints of pre-colonial geography through its commentary, and this footprint is still visible in today's urban and populous Varanasi.

Mahesh Madhav Gogate is an affiliated researcher at Kyoto University, Japan, studying the sacred and fluid geography of Varanasi, India. His research focuses on the transformation of water heritage sites and urban water management.
Email: mimawork@gmail.com

Notes

1 These different names epitomise the topographical and other salient features of the sacred region that were common in certain periods. The present name of the city (Varanasi) was officially declared by the Government of India in 1956.

2 Hegewald, Julia A. B. 2002. *Water Architecture in South Asia: A Study of Types, Developments and Meanings.* Leiden: Brill.

3 Rocher, Ludo (1986:131) highlights the importance of the Purāṇa-s in the context of understanding the pre-modern geography of India.

4 Ali, S. M. (1966:13) discusses the geography described in Purāṇa-s and mentions the Bhuvanakośa as a treasure of terrestrial mansions. Schwartzberg, Joseph E. (1992:312) describes the Bhuvanakośa as a 'geographical list' and equates it as a protogazetteer.

5 *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* (1.2; 5.20; 44.30) narrates about Varanasi placed high on his trident by Śiva. In his voluminous work of translating the *Skanda Purāṇa*, Tagare (1996) mentions in the footnotes about the *Rāja ghāṭa* plateau, the site of the ancient settlement of the city, which was on higher grounds and rarely flooded.

6 Eck, Diana L. 2015 (First Edition in 1983). Banaras: City of Light. New Delhi: Penguin India. The Sanskrit and Hindi words (including the temple tanks and ponds) are rendered as per the Sanskrit transliteration (excluding the nouns), and the English 's' is used as a plural marker after the hyphen sign e. g. Purāṇa-s.

Green and Pleasant Paddy Fields

Ashleigh Chow

In the well-known lines of William Blake's *Jerusalem* (c. 1804), sung often as a hymn, the poet celebrates England's green pastures, concluding: "'Till we have built Jerusalem / In Englands green & pleasant Land."[1] In a similar register, the art historian WJT Mitchell noted that the category of landscape painting was a purely modern European phenomenon, encompassing a new gaze derived from an 'originary moment' in which the visitor gazes at 'natural' beauty through the lens of God.[2] Much like the evocative lyrics of *Jerusalem*, the act of depicting a land could never be neutral; to some extent, it always embodies one's political, patriotic, or imperialist tendencies.

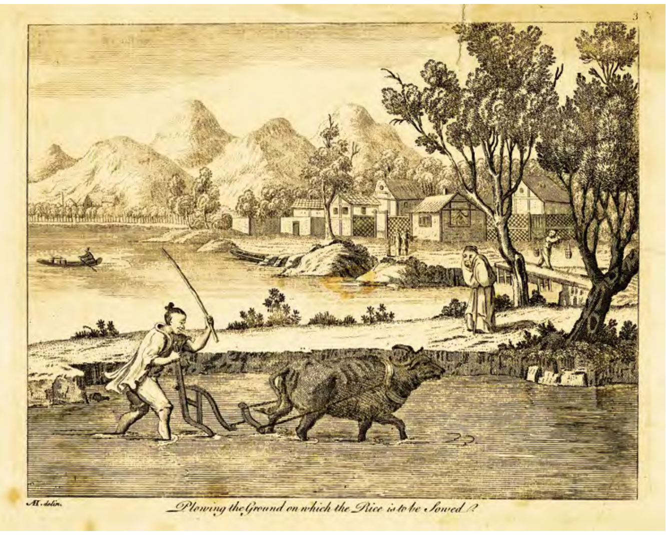

3
M. delin.
Plowing the Ground on which the Rice is to be Sowed

Fig. 1: John June (active. 1744-1775), printed by John Bowles (1701?-1779), 'Plowing the ground on which the Rice is to be Sowed,' *The Rice Manufactury*, c. 1770s, etching on paper, British Museum, London (Photo: British Museum, London) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

This is the first sustained study on the series of etchings originally published as *The Rice Manufactury* (c. 1770s) by the printmaker John June (active. 1744-1775), sold by the renowned eighteenth-century printseller John Bowles (1701?-1779) [Fig. 1]. Depicting scenes of rice cultivation in China, the etchings directly reproduce in mirror-image the *Yuzhi Gengzhi tu* 御製耕織圖 *(Imperially Commissioned Pictures of Tilling and Weaving)* (1696) [Fig. 2], an album of sets of 23 woodblock prints commissioned by the Qing Dynasty Kangxi Emperor (1654-1722, r. 1661-1722). Completed by the Qing Court astronomer Jiao Bingzhen 焦秉貞 (active c. 1680-1720), they depict two of imperial China's most important economic activities: rice and silk production.

Notably, the historian James Hevia recognised how late 18th-century British notions of 'China' dovetailed with British self-identity to provide a rhetorical framework for British attitudes towards the commercial and imperial viability of China, culminating in the Macartney Embassy of 1793, which sought to open new trading opportunities.[3] By understanding how the Kangxi Emperor's woodblock visions of rice cultivation were constructed and subsumed into a different visual repertoire in the last quarter of the 18th century through these prints in England, this essay locates these 'novel' landscapes within larger imperial ambitions.

The British Museum online catalogue describes John June as a 'printmaker' who 'etched scenes of London life.'[4] Despite the fact that the rice cultivation prints are reproductions of Chinese woodblock prints, this identification of June as a printmaker of 'London life' hits surprisingly close to his reality. As the British Empire was both a geopolitical entity and a subject of the British imagination, in John June's prints, the real subject is not China but the British imperial 'vision' – where scenes of 'China' were to be understood as a representation of nature itself, a land to be beheld and possessed.

An intercultural discourse of landscape?: *Shanshui* and the Western landscape

Observing the overall equilibrium in Figure 1, the viewer's eyes are first drawn to the quiet labour of the worker in the foreground. The eye is pulled back through the receding space, to the neatly lined trees of varying species in the background, matched by an arrangement of thoughtfully composed hills. While *The Rice Manufactury* was known to have been in circulation by the 1770s, the prints were later republished in *A New Book of Landscapes* (1794). In addition to suggesting the work's continuing popularity among the British public, the book's title title further indicates the perceived novelty and exotic nature of the landscapes. How, then, did the Kangxi *Gengzhi tu* become understood as landscapes in the British prints, within a discourse that WJT Mitchell deemed to be entirely Western?

On his Second Tour to the South in 1689, Emperor Kangxi was presented with a Song Dynasty (960-1279) edition of *Pictures of Tilling and Weaving*, comprising original poems written by the court official Lou Shu 樓壽 (1090-1162). Describing the processes of rice and silk production, these formed a highly revered tradition of sympathetic labour genre works. As the Manchu emperor of a bustling empire, Kangxi established himself through this Chinese tradition, commissioning Jiao Bingzhen to complete 23 scenes of rice production and 23 scenes of silk production as coloured woodblock prints. He also added a suite of new poems, which acknowledged the labourers' mundane toil, thereby dignifying the role of individuals and continually encouraging the advancement of agricultural productivity.

In China, the term for landscape painting – *shanshui* 山水 – translates directly as 'mountain and water.' Deriving from a 5th-century tradition, this terminology implies the direct consideration of a highly specific subject matter, referring to natural mountains and rivers. Moreover, such paintings were historically interpreted as depicting the essential interactions between human beings and nature through metaphorical calligraphic strokes, where the focus is not on its imitative representations of reality, but rather the viewer's contemplative experience.[5]

Observing *shanshui* paintings such as the *Xunxian shanshui tu* 尋僊山水圖 album of landscapes by Shitao, with their curves of recurrent rocks, trees and cone-shaped hills, the artist echoed the themes of dwelling amongst lakes and hills [Fig. 3].

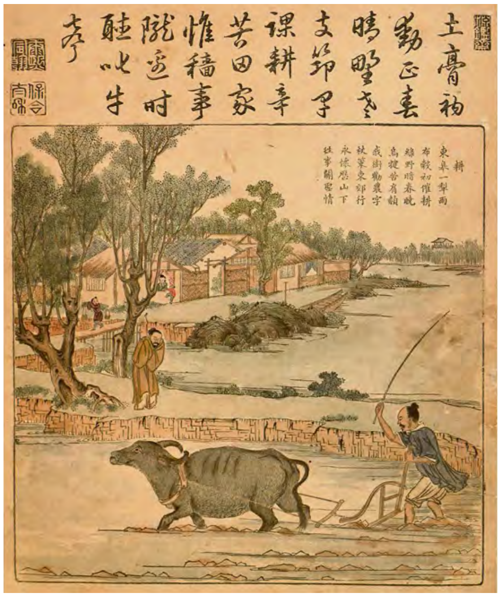
However, as Mitchell noted, all visions of scenery are 'mediated by culture,' and one way in which the Kangxi *Gengzhi tu* might match with the Western conception of landscape is the pervasive idea of the 'artifice' embedded in the scenes.[6] Similarly, writing about 18th-century British agricultural paintings, Christiana Payne noted how labourers who were often half-starved and exploited were visualised as attractive, optimistic, and unthreatening.[7]

In Figure 1, the farmer, depicted in side-profile, appears clean and well-fed as the water buffalo pulls the plough. Lifting a whip, the man carries out his work in an atmosphere of cooperation and sensibility. The farmer is in command of the water buffalo and the ploughing activity, as an elderly man, slightly hunched over, watches from afar. Despite the activity of the foreground, a sense of stillness and timelessness is evoked in the left background, where a boat sails on the water without stirring a ripple. The labourer's facial expressions are ambiguous. Notably, his toil is not visualised as overly gruelling, turning the focus onto nature and his surroundings – all pictured to be under his control. Sharing a similar notion of idealisation, the Kangxi *Gengzhi tu* offered a didactic exemplar of the social and domestic virtues of the Chinese countryside.

Functioning as Kangxi's visions of an ideal state, the Emperor also repositions his own legacy within the *Gengzhi tu*. Seen in Figure 2, each picture is accompanied by two sets of texts. The first text is set in small, standard characters inside the frame of the scene, occupying the negative spaces within the view. The second texts, written in running script calligraphy above the image, are poetic reflections added by Emperor Kangxi, accompanied by his personal seals. Every single poem maintains a compassionate tone. For example, the poem on winnowing acknowledges 'it must be understood [that to eat] white congee as it [easily] slides off a spoon, requires all kinds of effort from the farmers.'[8] With their slender figures and oval faces, the women and men in the pictures are all elegant and healthy. Implying his watching yet sympathetic eye through the narrative voice in his poems, Kangxi expressed his commitment to a prosperous society founded upon the economic benefits of rice and silk production.

Discussing how landscape was 'integrally connected with imperialism,' Mitchell concludes that it is within this space that ideology is 'veiled and naturalised.'[9]

Fig. 2:
Jiao Bingzhen 焦秉貞 (active c. 1680-1720), 'Tilling (geng) 耕', *Kangxi Imperially Commissioned Pictures of Tilling and Weaving*, coloured woodblock print on paper, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (Photo: Library of Congress, DC).



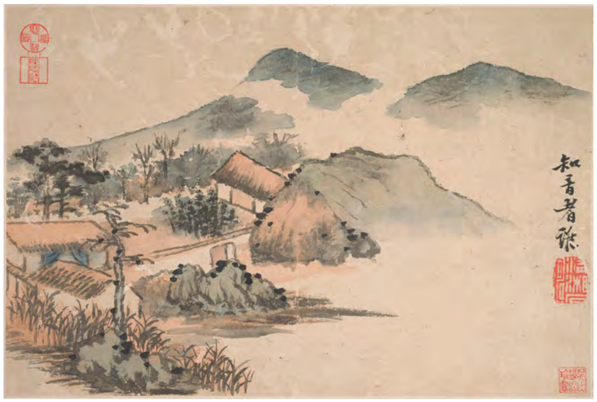


Fig. 3: Shitao 石濤 (Zhu Ruoji 朱若極), *Xunxian shanshui tu* 尋僊山水圖 (Landscapes), c. 1690s, Album of eight leaves, ink and colour on paper, 21 × 31.4 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

In parallel terms, despite their radically dissimilar original interpretative contexts, as the works are moved into an English discursive framework, the *Gengzhi tu* compositions transform from didactic images of labour into Western landscapes as *The Rice Manufactury*.

The 'Chinese' prospect and its culture of politics

As the composition of the prints are transformed from their square format into their landscapes, on a pictorial level, both the Kangxi poem and the prose-format descriptions of the process are removed. In turn, they are replaced with a short description to illuminate the process in English, such as 'Plowing the Ground on which the Rice is to be Sowed' [Fig. 1]. Although the explicative tone suggests an earnest inquisitiveness towards the agricultural process, the absence of a shared textual language makes it unsurprising that, throughout the British prints, the Chinese texts were understood as mere surface decoration rather than semiotic symbols. Indeed, such texts were eventually removed to focus on the visualisations of rice production. However, on an ideological level, this functions more significantly. Where the large poem written in running script calligraphy is understood as Kangxi's assertion of the divine order of society, his mandate of heaven is removed. Instead, his watchful eye is turned into one in which the British viewer's gaze is superimposed onto the scene.

Figure 4 and Figure 5 both share a sense of orderliness in their compositions, as the labourers appear without a trace of dirt. Notably, June's picture adheres to the principles of the Georgic, defined by man's role in nature to transform physical labour into material products [Fig. 4]. In the foreground, with their backs hunched over, the farmers capture the viewers' attention. As the rice plants are arranged along a grid formation, following the rules of linear perspective, they become smaller as they recede in space. Other details, such as the man with an ox in the distance, draw the eyes through a sinewy path towards the horizon line, towards the open view.

Meanwhile, framing the scene with mulberry trees, Jiao designates the delicate barks through a series of sinewy strokes, almost resembling a calligraphic performance within the literati painting tradition [Fig. 5]. In later scenes, these mulberry trees become integral to understanding the processes of silk production, as they are harvested to feed the silkworms. However, when absorbed into the English medium, the details of the mulberry tree hollows are lost [Fig. 7], as the bifurcations of the tree trunks recall an ambiguous vision of birch, or even elder trees.

In the late 18th century, British naturalists arrived in China anticipating its rich flora and fauna, keen to classify and collect samples, to bring this knowledge back to England.[10] With great public interest in 'exotic' flora, it is perhaps surprising that instead of replicating and recognising the topographical traditions of the Kangxi *Gengzhi tu*, the unusual plants were transformed into those generic – or 'natural' – to the landscapes that June's audiences would have known. I argue that it is within this inevitable slippage in their discourses of interpretation that June reveals the tension in renditions of the picturesque. Firstly, within this framework, the uniqueness of a view, embodied through its ruggedness, had to be underscored within a framework of applicable formal elements derived from European art. Consequently, in the assumption of the British gaze towards the 'Chinese' landscape, there is an implicit establishment of the hierarchy of the generalising British landscape aesthetics over the Chinese particularities.

By conveying and beautifying local differences, *The Rice Manufactury* turns the distant and unfamiliar into the approachable. The prints do not only establish a gaze of possession over the landscape of Chinese labour; they also also aestheticise it. At this time, concurrent to the republication of *The Rice Manufactury* as *A New Book of Landscapes*, the genre of the landscape was accessible and was widely consumed, appealing to the eye as a scene of humble English rural scenery. 'China' was now made accessible to members of the middling classes. Studying the relationship between landscape paintings and the landed gentry, the social historian John Barrell argued that the 'naturalisation' of man into his landscape proves a natural theology wherein the rural poor were continually obliged to express their gratitude and obedience to the landowners.[11] In turn, the viewers assume the gaze of the rich landowner. By implication, infused in this gaze is the underlying motivation of land possession, where the viewer gazes in comfort toward a harmonious scene of work that is deemed morally and aesthetically satisfying.

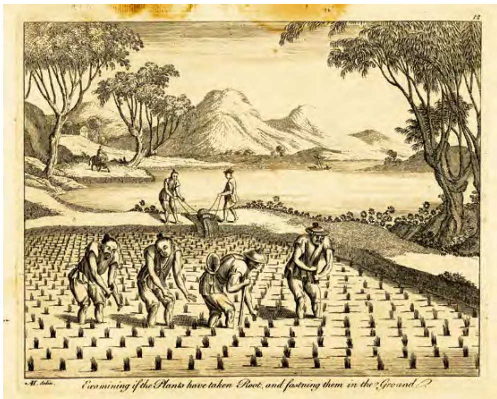

12
Examining if the Plants have taken Root, and fastning them in the Ground

Fig. 4: John June (active. 1744-1775), printed by John Bowles (1701?-1779), 'Examining if the Plants have taken Root, and fastning them in the Ground', *The Rice Manufactury*, c. 1770s, etching on paper, British Museum, London (Photo: British Museum, London) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Patterns of thought: 'China' and 'Britain'

When discussing the British Empire in Asia, it is often the high imperialism of the late 19th-century British Raj or the occupation of Hong Kong that stands for the colonial project. However, art historians have oft neglected to analyse the works of art leading up to formal colonisation within this larger imperial motivation, where the British underwent new imaginings in their visions of China, which eventually culminated in the Macartney Embassy. Given the centrality of print culture in fuelling the identity and consciousness of the British public, we can observe how constructed visions of colonial landscapes were integrated within this tradition of disseminating ideas.

In the late 18th century, first runs for major political printsellers were conventionally between 500 to 2000 impressions.[12] Considering the republication of *The Rice Manufactury* in 1794, we can assume that rice cultivation prints were seen by an even greater number of members of the British middling classes and public. Relatively cheap to produce and sold for little money, prints proved a large viewership potential, providing ample medium in which ideas could be widely circulated. After the mid-18th century, in response to growing print markets in Europe, local English designs riddled with nationalist sentiment and patriotic subject matter proliferated.[13] Such trends are visible throughout the works commissioned by John Bowles, who also typically commissioned images of maps, national heroes, and historic sites. It is in this context that prints played a vital cultural role in elevating the intellectual and moral achievements of the British people, as a means of constructing and bolstering an ambitious view of national reach.

Where pictorial tensions of the 'foreign' collided with the 'native,' the imperial historians Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose also noted the importance of feeling 'at home' to ease and strengthen the myth of unity across the British Empire.[14] If notions of domesticity helped to mediate the moral uneasiness of British empire-building, then similarly, June's prints situate visually the viewers' 'home' within the land of 'China.'

In this way, China is historicised not as a place of its people but a land of productive work. Viewed through print commodity, China is framed and trapped in the imperial gaze as a land of commodities, as a simultaneously demystified yet fantastical land of productivity and labour. From their conception, the Kangxi *Gengzhi tu* were fictive and not representative of Chinese society. The images did not merely function didactically to explain the steps of rice and silk production, but also asserted Kangxi's ambition and explicated a method for an economically prosperous society – in which their reality differed from the images. Works like *The Rice Manufactury*, casting the Chinese in a curious light, generated a new imaginative space – both pictorially and in the geographical imagination – for viewers.

Linking back to Blake's famous poem *Jerusalem*, John June's employment of British landscape aesthetics reframed the laborious effort of the Chinese farmers – as acknowledged by Emperor Kangxi – into an English 'green and pleasant Land.' In tandem with changing ideas of China, projections of the British self were negotiated from this shifting grid of pictorial relations, from the Kangxi *Gengzhi tu* to John June's *The Rice Manufactury*, trapping the process of Chinese rice cultivation within the British gaze of curiosity. At the same time, such differences were cast in tension – by nature, the subjects amplified the question of difference, they were to be made palatable by the growing British Empire, to potentially be seen as also British. It was this imagination that acted as a conduit for Britain, her art, and her desire for Empire.

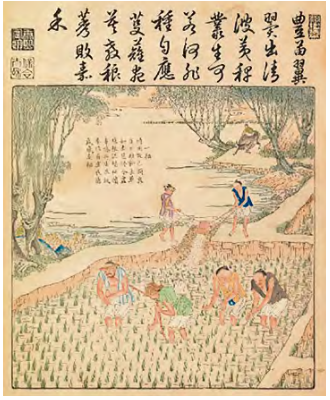


Fig. 5: Jiao Bingzhen 焦秉貞 (active c. 1680-1720), 'The First Weeding (*yiyun*) 一耘', *Kangxi Imperially Commissioned Pictures of Tilling and Weaving*, coloured woodblock print on paper, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (Photo: Library of Congress, DC).

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Notes

1 William Blake, *Jerusalem* [*"And did those feet in ancient time"*] (London: Trianon Press, William Blake Trust, 1952)
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7 Christiana Payne, *Toil and Plenty: Images of the Agricultural Landscape in England 1780-1890* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 23
8 Translations by Philip K. Hu, as reproduced in Roslyn Lee Hammers, *The Imperial Patronage of Labour Genre Paintings in Eighteenth-Century China* (London: Routledge, 2021), see chapter on 'Kangxi Imperially Commissioned Poems'.
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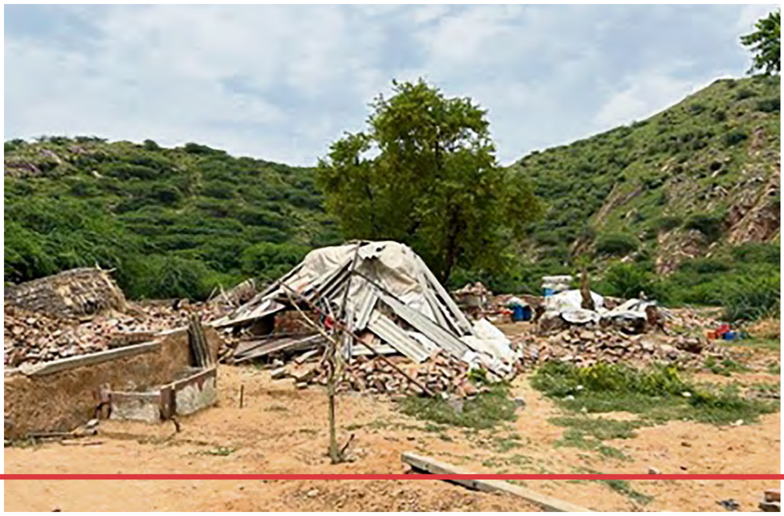


Fig. 1: Homes demolished in Nuh-Mewat after the outbreak of violence between the residents and supporters of vigilante groups. (Photo courtesy of Akram Akhtar Choudhary, 2023)

New Sovereignty amidst Vigilante Politics

Examining the Juridical Relationship between Far Right Hindu Nationalism and the State in India (2013-2023)

Vishal Singh Deo and
Akram Akhtar Choudhary

The last decade has seen an increasing number of attacks against Muslims, led mainly by members of vigilante outfits that ascribe to far-right Hindu nationalism. This essay tries to examine the inclination of agrarian youth in the north of India to seek avenues of socio-political mobility within vigilante outfits. We attribute this to the popularity of the current ruling regime: the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), supported by its organisational arm the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS). In the agrarian north, such an appeal has been able to penetrate and replace older peasant solidarities with a broader appeal of Hindu brotherhood *(bhychara)*. A sense of Hindu guardianship to recover from a feeling of victimhood has been assumed by local strongmen who are committed to violence against Muslims.

Interestingly enough, these outfits or *sanghatans* do not constitute a formal relationship with the BJP or the RSS. Rather, it is the commitment to far right politics and violence that draws in youth who aspire for a wider recognition within the formal political structures of the ruling BJP. In response, the state has increasingly accommodated far-right violence by way of a tacit nexus with vigilantism, demonstrated in the arbitrary implementation of law and order. This article shows how a state that is accommodative to vigilantism portends to shift the juridical character of sovereignty for Muslim victims of violence. Additionally, attacks against political opponents, journalists, and activists show how such a pattern can be extended to include new enemies or alleged threats.

Muslim lives between Muzaffarnagar 2013 and Nuh-Mewat 2023

During the general elections of 2014, the state of Uttar Pradesh played a decisive role in guaranteeing the victory of the BJP. The party swept 71 of the 80 parliamentary seats, a significant number that helped in crossing the half way mark of 272 seats. The election comprises millions of votes polled in 542 seats spread across a variegated electoral landscape of the Indian subcontinent. Although the elections of 2014 were fought on the promise of developmentalism and against alleged corruption of the incumbent Congress Party regime, there was an overt display of far-right nationalist tendencies in the BJP's poll pitch. In Uttar Pradesh, the campaign was vitiated by the anti-Muslim riots of 2013 that swept through parts of the Western regions abutting the national capital Delhi. The violence, perpetuated by dominant peasant castes such as the Jats, led to the displacement of over 70,000 persons belonging to the Muslim community. The displaced continue to live in shanties on the margins of congested towns such as Shamli and Muzaffarnagar. Their pleas for justice and compensation have been met with strong disavowal and intimidation by far-right outfits. Such resistance is led by local Jat strongmen who in 2013-14, broke away from the secular appeals of peasant brotherhood to formally align with the electoral interests of the BJP. Now in 2023, these leaders are either elected to positions of power, such as the union minister Sanjeev Baliyan, or else they wield major local clout, as in the case of hereditary caste headman Rajinder Singh Malik. These leaders have been instrumental in ensuring that pleas for justice by those displaced during the 2013-14 riots are delayed and denied.

It is alleged by those responsible for the riots that Muslim claims to monetary compensation are motivated by malefice, whereby false statements given to claim compensation also include names of 'innocent' persons who have spent many years in jail.[1]

A rival embodiment of criminality is manufactured, wherein displaced Muslims are seen as the aggressors. Take for instance Right to Information Act 2005 queries that were filed by one of the authors (Akram Akhtar) to solicit responses regarding the delay in compensation. The responses reveal how a nexus between the accused and the administration developed to compromise surveys conducted in 2013 and again in 2023 to identify the number of displaced families, missing or dead. One example is Ajit Singh, who was the elected head of the riot-hit village in 2013 and continues to remain the elected head. India has a three-tier democratic system where the election of village heads is recognised by constitutional and legal sanction. In a recent letter signed and attested by Singh and the *panchayat* (village council) members, as part of the survey, it is stated that those being considered displaced had run away from the village in 2013 [Figs. 2-3]. Therefore, there were no grounds to connect their disappearance or those being considered 'missing' with the violence [Fig. 4]. The delays in ascertaining the list of displaced Muslims has confirmed a sense of Hindu victimhood, whereby the displaced are held responsible for disrupting inter-community brotherhood *(bhychara)*.[2]

The more recent riots in August 2023 in Nuh-Mewat, located in the state of Haryana (adjacent to Delhi's western and northern borders) offer a clearer articulation of how vigilantism and the state have institutionalised the criminalisation of Muslims under the garb of law enforcement.[3]

In August 2023, a Hindu procession that annually visits a local temple in Muslim majority Nuh-Mewat in the state of Haryana, which shares its eastern and southern borders with Delhi, was infiltrated by masked men bearing swords, guns, and sticks.

In the days running up to the procession, Bitu Bajrangi and Monu Manesar, leaders of the far-right outfit Bajrang Dal, constantly put out videos stating that the procession was a show of strength against the local Muslims of Mewat.[4] Attempts to intimidate Muslims in the region comes in the wake of a systemic online attack that targets Muslim-majority Mewat as a hotbed of fundamentalism. On the day of the procession, the visible presence of armed men in the procession evoked a reaction from the local population, whose sticks and stones were met with gunfire from anonymous persons in the mob.[5]

A day after the violence, the administration heeded to calls by vigilante outfits to assuage their feelings of hurt by levelling exaggerated allegations of violence against the residents of Nuh-Mewat. The police responded by commencing a brazen demolition of over 1000 homes belonging to the local Muslims in Nuh-Mewat. The residents were handed backdated notices of eviction for being in violation of building regulations, and their homes were now classified as encroachments. Though the demolitions attracted widespread condemnation by human rights groups, the high court took three days to take notice. In writing an unsparing order to halt the demolitions, the court stated that the exercise to demolish was done under the guise of protecting law and order but asked whether it was an act of ethnic cleansing. Naseem, one local activist who was instrumental in saving the lives of persons who were part of the Hindu procession, also had his home demolished [Fig. 1].

Agrarian north and the crystallisation of vigilantism

In the states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh (UP), the rise of vigilantism builds upon or borrows from older forms of violence. It is a region that has been witness to decades of honour killings, conflicts over land ownership, and attacks on Muslims who constitute a sizeable share of the overall demography. Moreover, the lack of employment opportunities that have emerged out of an agrarian crisis has found expression in networks of organised crime that thrive on the illicit mining of sand, informal brick kilns, government contracts, and trade in illicit commodities.[6] Vigilante work is overseen by local strong men who profit from a criminalised economy and are able to provide economic stability and an expression for political ambition to the rural unemployed. It has drawn a vast number of youth into joining local far-right outfits who overlook contestations between caste groups.

An important issue that has been heavily politicised or has consistently determined the outcomes of vigilante is cow protection. The sacredness of the animal is pitted against Muslim butchers and cattle traders who, despite playing an important role in maintaining the land-livestock equilibrium, are portrayed as villainous cattle smugglers. From 2014 onwards, news reports drew attention to the growing number of lynchings that were being committed against Muslim cattle dealers on the suspicion of carrying beef. Routes connecting important cattle markets to agrarian spaces began to be controlled by vigilante outfits who chased and waylaid trucks carrying cattle. The far-right media ensured that instances of deaths and injuries caused to Muslim cattle dealers was used to defend the accused and hail the latter as saviours. The vilification of cattle dealers and therefore the whole Muslim community followed in the tracks of the Muzaffarnagar riots, where the victims were first demonised and later criminalised by law enforcement.

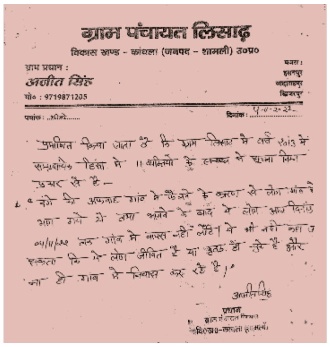
A second important issue has been that of love *jihad*, or the alleged elopement of Hindu women with Muslim men. In the agrarian north, the declining levels of employment have created a major obstacle for marriage for surplus men, who are viewed as undesirable in a marriage market that puts a high price on those with government jobs. Forced bachelorhood is rescued by way of self-professed celibacy. This is articulated by way of vigilantes, who stand guard against *love Jihad*.

Law and order as an obfuscation of vigilante violence

How does a legal architecture reimagine itself in relation to vigilantism, especially in the context of BJP-ruled states in the north, where vigilante networks have been an active force for at least a decade? The period after the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 showed how pleas for justice by the displaced were turned into a conspiracy that escalated feelings of Hindu victimhood. Over the years, the ability of far-right outfits to influence law enforcement has also developed into a strategy to enact anti-Muslim legislation. Many of the BJP-ruled states have strengthened the laws against cow slaughter that were in place for decades. In UP, soon after Yogi Adityanath came to power, it was decided to make such laws more punitive. The earlier anti-cow slaughter legislation was amended and tethered to the National Security Act (NSA).[7] In this way, a person accused of cattle smuggling is typically viewed as an enemy of the state/nation. The NSA permits prolonged periods of confinement without recourse to redressal. The post-2013 period has also shown how each year, cases that were filed against the accused rioters were closed for want of evidence. The working of law and order in such cases undergirds and reinforces local forms of vigilantism.

In Haryana, the situation is slightly more direct and brazen: cattle vigilantes are now incorporated into a task force that works with the police in apprehending alleged cattle smugglers.[8] This also explains the reason for the meteoric rise of persons like Monu Manesar, accused of inciting the violence in Nuh-Mewat. Manesar has been a long-term member of the cattle task force and is a popular Youtuber, who uses the online platform to post videos of waylaying and nabbing alleged cattle smugglers. In February 2023, two Muslim men were abducted, tortured, and burnt, allegedly by Manesar and his men.[9] Yet, the administration in Haryana has been slow to respond to these charges or to acknowledge Manesar's involvement in inciting the recent violence in Nuh. Manesar is affiliated with the pan-Indian Bajrang Dal and therefore attracts a great deal of coverage on social media and within right-leaning political circles. Men like Manesar ignite aspirations that create pockets of majoritarian populism across the agrarian north. These are groups who are not necessarily affiliated with pan-Indian outfits but still contribute to the general movement, whose commitment to violence and hate has a bearing on the legal framework.

While vigilantism can influence how the law is implemented, it meets with juridical ambiguity when the absence of law necessitates – or is perceived to necessitate – a response to a manufactured Islamic threat. In such instances, the government either amends an existing law – as in the case of cow slaughter – or it manufactures a new law. Anti-conversion laws, for instance, came into being as an outcome of anxiety espoused by surplus men in the north about the alleged elopement of Hindu women with Muslim men. Soon after the enactment of the law, its implementation involved the active role of vigilante groups, who violently intervened to stop interfaith alliances. While the law purports to deal with 'forced' marriage, it is vigilante men who, with the help of the police, intimidate and frame false cases against Muslim men in consensual relationships with Hindu women. The pervasive role of these groups has been brought to light when Hindu women who consented to marry Muslim men refused to testify that the marriage was a case of forced conversion.



ग्राम पंचायत लिसाढ़

विकास खण्ड - कांधला (जनपद - शामली) उ०प्र०

ग्राम प्रधान :
अजीत सिंह
मो० : 9719871205

मजरा :
हसनपुर
बादशाहपुर
खिजरपुर

पत्रांक : ...
दिनांक : 4-11-2022

प्रमाणित किया जाता है कि ग्राम लिसाढ़ में वर्ष 2013 में साम्प्रदायिक हिंसा में 11 व्यक्तियों के सम्बन्ध में सूचना निम्न प्रकार से है –

1. दंगे के उपरान्त गांव में [illegible] के कारण से लोग गांव से भाग गये थे तथा भागने के बाद से लोग आज दिनांक 04/11/22 तक गांव में वापस नहीं लौटे। ये भी नहीं कहा जा सकता कि ये लोग जीवित है या मृतक हो चुके हैं और ना ही गांव में निवास कर रहे हैं।

अजीत सिंह
प्रधान
ग्राम पंचायत लिसाढ़
वि०ख०-कांधला (शामली)

Fig. 2 (above): Letter signed by Ajit Singh and attested by members of the village stating that there is ambiguity over where the so-called displaced are, as they ran away from the village and never returned. It further states that it is therefore not possible to ascertain whether they are alive or dead. (Image courtesy of Afkar Foundation – Shamli)

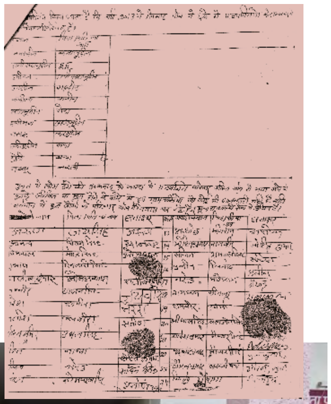


Fig. 3 (above right): Right to Information Act Reponses showing signatures of members of the local panchayat attesting to the ambiguity over the so called displaced and missing persons. (Photo courtesy of Afkar Foundation - Shamli)

Fig. 4 (right): Displaced families frequently visit the administrative offices in pursuit of basic entitlements such as water, sanitation, and electricity. (Photo courtesy of Rizwan Saifi, 2023)

What about extra-judicial killings?

In 2017, when Yogi Adityanath assumed office, he announced a policy to clean up crime and create a safe haven for business to flourish. Since then, over 10,000 gun fights targeting mostly Muslims and lower-caste men have taken place. In police reports filed after an alleged gun fight, the introductory lines often claim that the police received a tip from an informer, after which the authorities swung into action and engaged the dreaded criminal. While the alibi of the police informer is not specific to the state of UP, there appears a close interlinkage between anonymous tips, vigilantes, and the selective use of police force against Muslims. The investigations that follow – since gun fights have to be investigated as per supreme court rulings and criminal procedure – conform to a construction of a crime scene as indicated in the (highly suspect) initial incident report. Evident signs of torture in the postmortem report and gunpowder signs indicating close-range fire are subsumed under the claim of self-defence.

At best, civil society groups have limited themselves to only questioning police claims of self-defence, but the basic plea remains to inquire into whether police procedure was followed during a gun fight.[10] However, since the chain of events is neatly constructed bearing in mind the demands of legal procedure and human rights conventions, the police are able to justify the use of excessive force in the name of self-defence. This helps the state defend itself on the grounds of protecting 'law and order' or working within the confines of known procedural conventions.

With a ready stable of informers available, the possibility of further violence against victim families cannot be ruled out. Take the case of Meena and Mustakeem. Their son Waseem was killed in an alleged encounter in 2017, and their son Mukeem was killed in judicial custody in 2021.[11] Soon after Waseem's death, Meena was framed under the Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances Act, while Mustakeem has been framed in over 12 criminal cases since 2017. Despite criminalisation being used against them as an intimidation strategy, the family recently filed a writ in the supreme court. Their plea was represented by the noted lawyer and former union minister Kapil Sibal. The writ comes in the wake of the brazen demolition of Muslim homes in UP and instances where undertrials such as former parliamentarian Ateek Ahmed have been shot dead in broad daylight, while in police custody and in full view of the media.

Local sovereigns and the universal claims to citizenship

Monu Manesar, mentioned earlier, offers an example of how far-right populist politics can propel one from a local Hindu sovereign into a pan-Indian *Dharam rakshak* ("protector of faith"). And yet, Manesar is only one of the many local leaders across north India who command a social media presence and enjoy a cosy relationship with law enforcement.

This also brings us to a final question: What consequences does such a state-vigilante nexus have for the universal questions of sovereignty? The daily attacks on Muslims have acquired a juridical character of impunity that poses a universal threat not just to persecuted groups but also social groups and movements that are critical of the government's pro-capital developmental outlook. An overwhelming climate of fear and intimidation is obscured by the government's tokenistic claims of 'pro-poor' policies. A broad national consensus is therefore pitted against naysayers and critiques of the government, often by showing how Muslims, who many claim are persecuted, are joining the BJP in large numbers. This is not untrue, as is seen in the growing popularity of the Muslim Rashtriya Manch, the pan-Indian Muslim outfit of the BJP. The outfit has drawn numerous Muslim youth and leaders into the BJP fold [Fig. 5]. An emphasis on broadcasting images that show Muslim leaders wearing skull caps and sharing a stage with BJP's top brass is constantly beamed across social media, posters, and pamphlets. While this serves to communicate an inclusive face of the current regime, it also reproduces the stereotype of the pro-development Muslim. The latter is one who supports and endorses 'development' and 'progress' as a departure from the criminalised stereotype of Muslims who continue to feed into fears (e.g., love *Jihad*, cattle smuggling, fundamentalism) and anxieties of Hindu victimhood.[12]

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Reconstructing a Pagoda-Temple of 5th-Century Dunhuang

Zhenru Zhou and Yihua Sun

The pagoda-temple, a type of Buddhist architecture that flourished in early-medieval China, evolved from the Indian stupa prototype during the spread of Buddhism along the Silk Road. The Mogao caves near Dunhuang, an oasis town in present-day Gansu province in northwest China, preserve various images of Buddhist architecture in mural paintings and cave forms, all of which provide invaluable insight into how the dome-shaped stupa was adapted to the timber-structured construction system in China. Based on textual, visual, and archeological evidence from 5th-century Dunhuang and beyond, this article proposes a theoretical reconstruction of the prototypical pagoda-temple. Digital imaging allows us to see what the non-extant architecture would have looked like, and to ponder how Chinese pagodas have interacted with multiple architectural forms.

The flourishing of Buddhist temples along the Eastern Silk Road during the 3rd-6th centuries is well documented in Chinese historical texts. The *Book of Jin* (*Jinshu* 晉書), the chronicle of one of the Chinese states in the Period of Division (220–589 CE), reports the large quantity of Buddhist architecture in Khotan (in present-day Xinjiang autonomous region), "in which a hundred buddha-pagoda-temples (*fo-ta-miao* 佛塔廟) stood."[1] The name *buddha-pagoda-temples* indicates the dominance of pagodas in such temples. The *Book of Wei* (*Weishu* 魏書), the chronicle of the Northern and Eastern Wei states (386–550), records the proliferation of Buddhism and Buddhist buildings in Dunhuang: "Dunhuang was adjacent to the West Regions, where Buddhist conventions and local traditions encountered each other and fused into a classic mode. Villages and towns were connected to each other, and they often had pagoda-temples (*ta-si* 塔寺)."[2] This text suggests that the Buddhist architecture in Dunhuang integrated the features of Central Asian Buddhist architecture and those of northwest Chinese secular architecture.

A Dunhuang mural representing the pagoda-temple

Although most of the early Buddhist structures in northwest China have disappeared or decayed, visual representation of the pagoda-temple is found in the mural paintings that decorate the Buddhist caves of Dunhuang. A Buddha-preaching scene in Mogao Cave 257 of the Northern Wei period (386–534) is among the earliest Dunhuang murals that represents an architectural frame around the Buddha image [Fig. 1].

In this scene, a temple hall frames a standing Buddha and two attendants inside. The temple is depicted as a gable roof topped by a miniature stupa and buttressed by a pair of *que* gate-towers on two sides. Each *que* gate-tower comprises two pillars that are topped with roofs at different heights.[3] Serving as the finial of the building, the miniature stupa is carefully rendered. It displays, from bottom to top, a dome in the shape of an upturned alms bowl, a post base in the shape of tiered crenelations, an elongated cone representing the stacked dishes, a triple-jewel crown, and a pair of streamers. The painter also articulates architectonic details of the timber-structured roofs, the earthen or masonry walls, and curtains hung in the temple. Displaying a good knowledge of architecture, this pictorial image seems to be based on temples that stood in the region at the time.

Before treating this image as visual representation of a freestanding building, one must determine *how* it represents the three-dimensional form. A strange point, as Chinese architectural historian Xiao Mo points out, is the placement of the miniature pagoda *above* the gable roof. Presuming that a timber-structured roof would not be strong enough to support a heavy earthen pagoda, Xiao takes the image to be not so much a realistic documentation as an artistic imagination.[4] On the other hand, Dunhuang specialist Sun Ruxian holds a more positive view toward the credibility of the image. By comparing it with remains of pagoda-centered temples in Xinjiang, Sun suggests that the image possibly represents an architectural hybrid of the Chinese hall, the *que* gate-tower, and the dome-shaped stupa, of which some kind of hybridization did exist.[5] Nonetheless, neither of them has explored the exact way in which these various building types could possibly be put together architecturally.

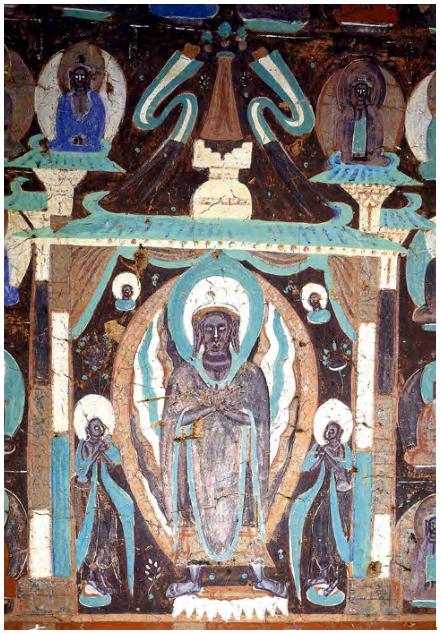
The current article investigates the spatial relationship between the stupa and the temple hall that is indicated by the image. The architectural image is a three-dimensional space projected on a pictorial plane. Hence, it does not really suggest that the pagoda must be located on top of the roof. Alternatively, the stupa might stand *behind* the temple building and maintain its structural independence. The most direct way to examine this hypothesis is to first reconstruct the three-dimensional form of that pictorial pagoda-temple, and then evaluate whether it is in correspondence with historical and archaeological evidence.

Our theoretical reconstruction is a bipartite building complex comprising a gable-roofed front half with towering buttresses on two sides and a flat-roofed rear half with a stupa in the center [Fig. 2]. The mural highlights the centric position of the stupa dome above and the Buddha icon underneath; it indicates the marriage of a stupa-centered rear space and a front hall. The gable roof and the *que* gate-towers in the mural represent a front hall of the temple complex. As for the rear space, the pictorial depiction of the stupa dome above the gable-roofed building displays the former's exteriority, whereas that of the curtains reveals the interiority of a ritual space surrounding the Buddha icon. By inference, a structure that enshrines Buddha icon(s) is likely set beneath the dome and encircled by interior corridors. Our reconstruction, based on the major elements in the mural painting and assisted by digital modeling in SketchUp, proposes a reasonable solution to the structural and spatial problem.

Visual and archaeological evidence

This theoretical reconstruction is not just based on a close reading of the mural painting, but it also finds correspondence with a variety of sources, including historical texts, remains of freestanding Buddhist temples, and the designs of contemporaneous central-pillar cave-temples in Dunhuang.

As for the layout of a square-stupa centered quadrangle, the ancient pagoda-temples in Xinjiang provide reliable archaeological evidence. For example, the Rawak Temple in Niya preserves remains of



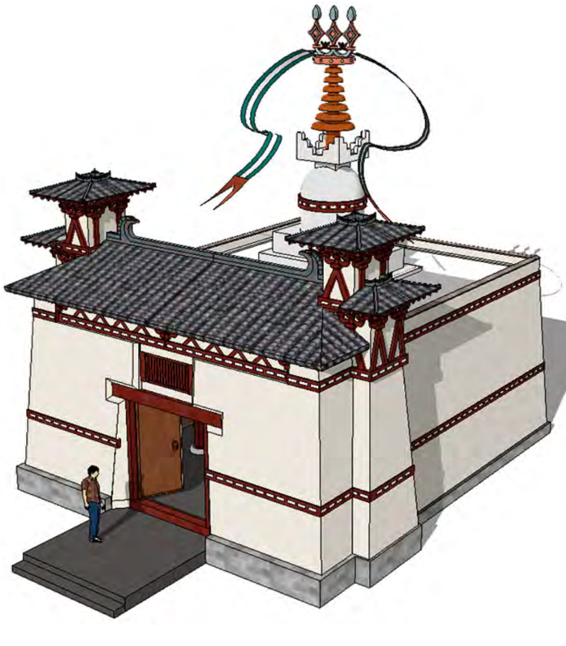
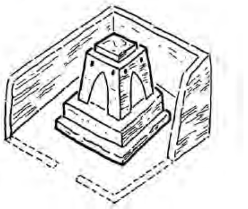


Fig. 1 (far left). Scene showing a buddha preaching in a pagoda temple, mural painting on the south wall of Mogao Cave 257. Dunhuang, Gansu Province. Northern Wei period (386–534). (Published in Sun and Sun, *Jianzhu hua juan*, fig. 17)

Fig. 2 (left). Bird's-eye view of the authors' digital reconstruction of the pagoda-temple represented in Fig. 1. (Drawing by Zhenru Zhou)

Fig. 3 (below): Diagram of a Buddhist shrine at the Ancient City of Jiaohe, Turpan, Xinjiang. 5th century. (Drawing by Sun Yihua)



an earth mass with Buddha statues and surrounding earthen walls, meaning that the central stupa used to be encircled by corridors.[6] For another instance, a remaining earthen temple in the ancient city of Jiaohe (present-day Turfan) displays traces of a central pillar and surrounding walls. The holes above the niche indicate the application of wood beams for supporting a roof [Fig. 3]. The original stupa, which must have comprised a finial, presumably extended above the now lost roof. The short distance between the holes indicates that relatively thin beams were applied. It has been a long tradition in northwest China to stack thin beams and purlins in the shape of superimposed quadrangles to support flat roofs, since this construction system does not require big pieces of wood that are hard to grow in dry places. Therefore, our reconstruction adopted this convention for the flat ceiling.

Although the exterior dome of the central stupa is not preserved in archeological sites, textual resource provides insight. *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang* (*Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記) by Yang Xuanzhi (fl. 547), a memorial of Buddhist temples in the late Northern-Wei capital city Luoyang, narrates how a Khotan king built a pagoda-temple: "The king of Yu-tien again had a hall built to house the portrait [and display it]. Now the reflection of the plate-shaped [stupa top] often appeared outside of the hall."[7] The form of this Buddhist architecture could be interpreted as such: a buddha hall was built to enshrine a Buddha icon, and the "plate-shaped [stupa top]" extended over the temple hall's roof. By inference, the exterior part would have been the stupa dome and the *chatra* (finial of a stupa or pagoda) above it, just like what is represented in the Dunhuang mural painting.

Archaeological sites in Xinjiang no longer preserve any complete interiors, but the central-pillar caves of Dunhuang provide crucial information about the interior design of a pagoda-temple. The central-[pagoda-] pillar caves (*zhongxin* [*ta*]*zhu ku* 中心[塔]柱窟), as coined by modern scholars, is a type of cave whose layout is believed to derive from the pagoda-centered cloister. The historical description of the central-pillar caves also indicates that they were actually conceived to be pagoda-temples. *The Stele Commemorating Li Kerang's Construction of a Buddhist Cave-Temple at Mogao*, written in 698 CE, records the construction and spatial layout of Mogao Cave 322, a central-pillar cave: "On the side I constructed another Buddhist temple, … in its center emerged a jeweled *chatra*. Corridors were excavated on its four sides for circumambulation … At the completion of the construction, I placed offerings in front of the pagoda."[8] This text explicitly addresses the architectural imagery of the central-pillar cave: the cave is viewed to be "a Buddhist temple" and its central pillar to be "a jeweled pagoda."

Thus, the architectural programs of the cave are revealed. The corridors were for circumambulation around the central pagoda, and the front hall was for image worship and making offerings. By inference, a freestanding pagoda-temple would have functioned in the same way. Considering its easier accessibility compared with a cave, a pagoda-temple probably sustained a wider range of activities, such as circumambulation, worshipping, lecturing, and gathering. Thus, it is reasonable to apply interior curtains, which can offer a flexible sub-division between the corridor space and the ante-hall space [Fig. 4].

Mogao Cave 254, a representative central-pillar cave of fifth-century Dunhuang, illustrates the bipartite spatial design. Moreover, it showcases the different architectural models that they are based on: the ante-hall space imitates the interior of a timber structure with a gable roof, and the corridor space derives from a flat-roofed building. The structural components represented in the ante-hall of Mogao Cave 251 – namely, a polychromic wood bracket-set and a pictorial column – imitates the timber-structured construction system widely applied in freestanding Chinese halls [Fig. 5]. In comparison, the coffered ceiling form is probably derived from Central Asia and Xinjiang regions. In fact, they are still in use in Tajik vernacular architecture. The contemporaneous central-pillar caves of Dunhuang testify to our reconstruction proposal regarding the interior space and the construction techniques.

Architectonic details in the mural agree with contemporaneous Dunhuang murals and textual records, affirming our reconstruction based on the architectural image. Another image of a similar stupa *chatra* can be found in a better-preserved mural painting in Mogao Cave 254. The *chatra* base, the stacked dishes, the crown-like triple jewels, and streamers are unambiguously depicted. The convention of hanging streamers on pagoda finial is well documented. The offerings made by royal members of the Northern Wei state for stupas in the Western Regions, for instance, are said to have included "one thousand multicolored banners, each one hundred Chinese feet long."[9] As this description indicates, the hanging streamers on the pagoda could be quite long, and they were widely distributed from north China to the Western Regions.

The sectioned pillars of the *que* gate-towers in the mural seem to represent rammed-earth walls, since it indicates the application of tie-beams for the purpose of binding the earthen walls more strongly. A tenth-century earthen shrine at Mogao demonstrates this common construction technique as well, and it is represented in our reconstruction of the pagoda-temple [Fig. 2]. The design of its front façade is based on typical designs displayed in Dunhuang murals. For instance, the front gate's form is derived from the gate of a celestial palace in Mogao Cave 248 of the Western Wei period (535–557). Moreover, since most central-pillar caves at Mogao contain a high window above the doorway, our reconstruction design includes an above-door window for a better natural lighting condition [Fig. 6].

Admittedly, certain aspects of our reconstruction, such as the *que* gate-towers flanking the front hall, find no corresponding evidence in archaeological sites. The main reference for our reconstruction is their visual representations in the Dunhuang Caves. Roofed niches flanked by *que* gate-towers are believed to represent Maitreya Bodhisattva's palace in the Tuṣita Heaven [Fig. 7]. That the mural and the niche share a similar design suggests the paradigmatic composition of the pitched-roofed hall and the *que* gate-towers.

Conclusion

In summary, this study of the pagoda-temple reveals how early Buddhist buildings in China embrace the various building traditions transmitted along the Eastern Silk Road. It also offers a theoretical reconstruction to synthesize our fragmented knowledge about the pagoda-temple from textual, visual, and archeological evidence. Although such pagoda-temples no longer stand in totality, this study envisions one among many possibilities. Reconstruction design and digital modeling were applied to study early architectures that do not provide the full picture. In the process of unveiling the architectural information using a modern visual language, we took into account the particularities of pictorial representation in mural paintings and sculptural representation in central-pillar caves. This article has shed light on the interrelationship among the multiple prototypes of early Buddhist architecture, namely, the central-pillar cave, the stupa and pagoda, and the temple complex.

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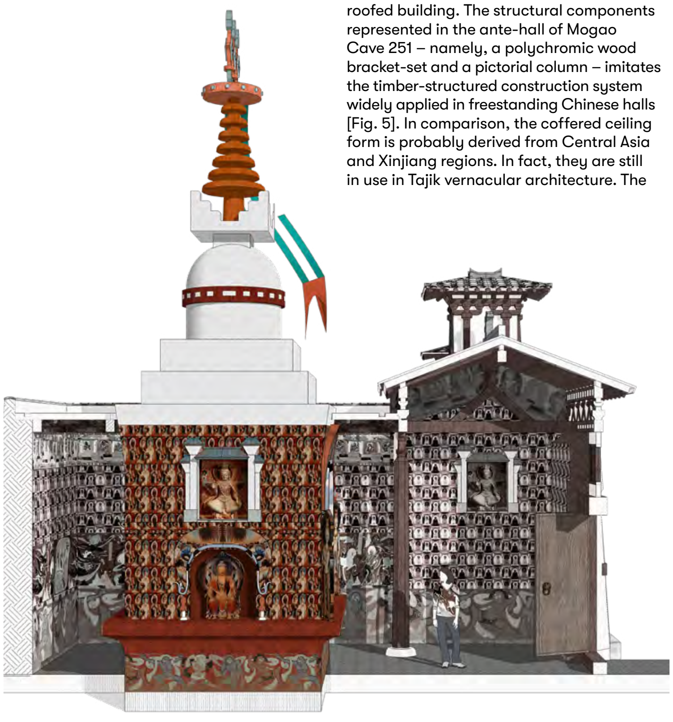

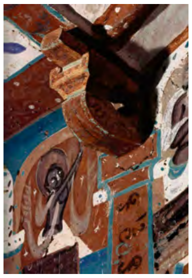

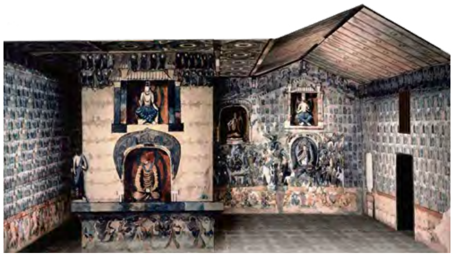

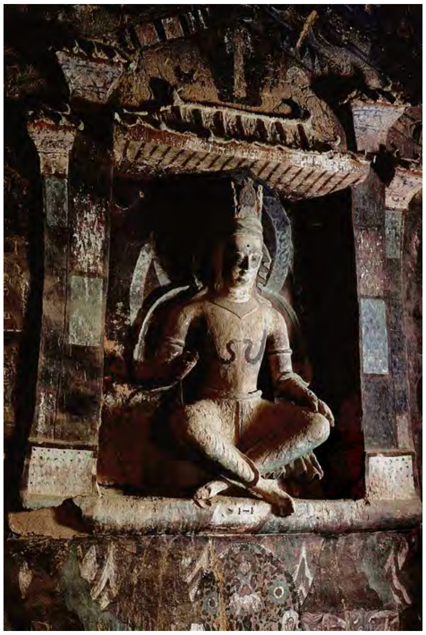

Fig. 4 (top left): Sectional perspective of the theoretical reconstruction of the pagoda-temple. (Drawing by Zhenru Zhou)

Fig. 5 (below far left): A wood bracket-set in Mogao Cave 251. Northern Wei period (386–534). (Published in Sun Yihua and Sun Ruxian, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Shiku jianzhu juan* [Complete Collection of Dunhuang Caves: Volume on Cave Architecture]. Hong Kong: shangwu yinshu guan, 2003, fig. 45)

Fig. 6 (below left): Sectional perspective of Mogao Cave 254. Northern Wei period (386–534). (Drawing by Sun Ruxian. Published in Sun and Sun, *Jianzhu hua juan*, fig. 27)

Fig. 7 (right): A gate-tower-shaped niche in Mogao Cave 254. (Published in Sun and Sun, *Shiku jianzhu juan*, fig. 30)

Notes

1 Fang Xuanling et al., *Siyi zhuan* [Records of Four Foreign Countries], in *Jinshu [The Book of Jin]*, 648. Translation by author.
2 Wei Shou, *Shilao zhi* ("the Records of Buddhism and Daoism"), in *Weishu [The Book of Wei]*, 554. Translation by author.
3 This type of *que* gate-tower is called the mother-and-son *que* gate-tower.
4 Xiao Mo, *Dunhuang jianzhu yanjiu* [A Study of Dunhuang Architecture] (Beijing: Cultural Relic Publication House, 1989), 157.
5 Sun Ruxian and Sun Yihua, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Jianzhu hua juan* [Complete Collection of Dunhuang Caves: Volume on Architectural Paintings] (Hong Kong: shngwu yinshu guan, 2001), 27–8.
6 Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 205.
7 Yang Xuanzhi, *Luoyang qielan ji jiaozhu* [*Annotation of A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang*], Fan Xiangyong annotated (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publication House, 1958), 271–2. Translation adapted from Hsuan-Chih Yang and Yi-T'ung Wang, *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1984), 221–2.
8 Zheng Binglin and Zheng Yinan, *Dunhuang bei ming zan jishi* [Annotated Collection of the Stelae, Epitaphs, and Eulogies of Dunhuang] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chuban she, 2019), 22–3. Translation by author.
9 Yang and Fan, *Luoyang qielan ji jiaozhu*, 329. Yang and Wang, *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang*, 242.

Preserving the Oroqen Culture

Richard T. Griffiths and Sarah Ward

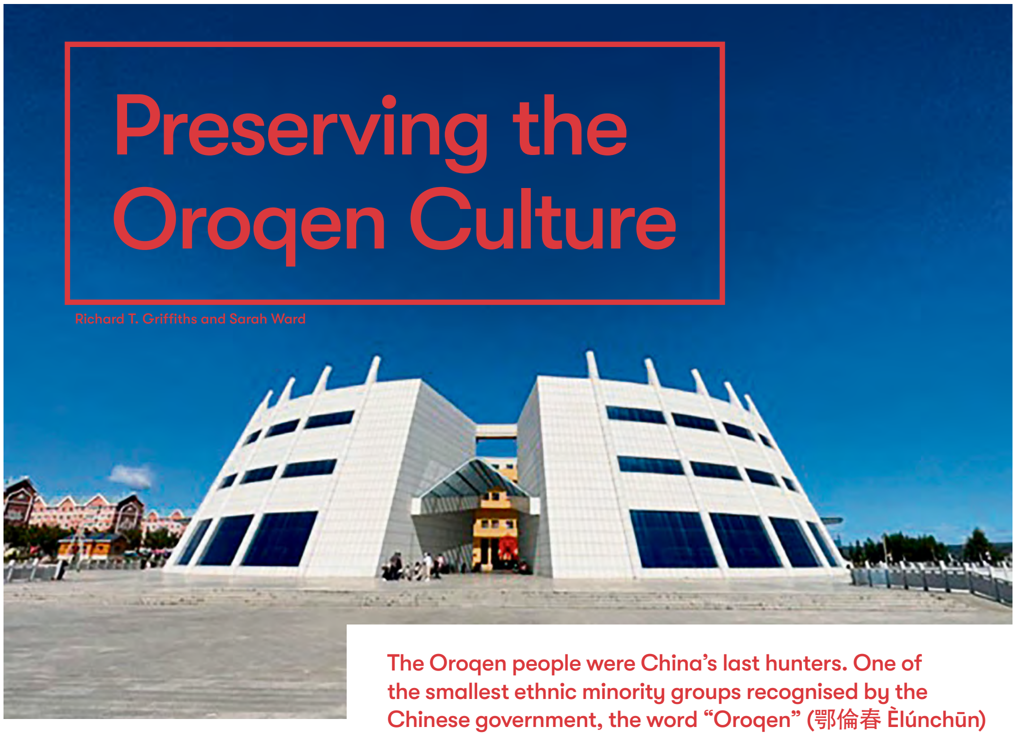

Fig. 1 (left): Oroqen Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum, Alihe, Inner Mongolia. (Photo by Sarah Ward, 2023)

The Oroqen people were China's last hunters. One of the smallest ethnic minority groups recognised by the Chinese government, the word "Oroqen" (鄂伦春 Èlúnchūn) means both "people on the mountains" and "people herding reindeer." Both meanings profoundly embody the characteristics of this ancient nation. Numbering less than 9000 people (0.0006 percent of the total Chinese population), the Oroqen people are concentrated in the provinces of Heilongjiang and Inner Mongolia. In September 2023, we had the privilege of visiting Jiagedaqi in Heilongjiang and Alihe in Inner Mongolia. Alihe is the administrative centre of the Oroqen Autonomous Banner. We met and talked to Oroqen leaders about the community's challenges in preserving and promoting their unique culture and heritage.

Recent history

The origin of the Oroqen people lies buried in the past, but by the start of the last millennium, they were settled in the vast forest region of the 1600km-long Hinggan (大兴安 Dàxīngān) Mountain range. Here, they lived relatively undisturbed, hunting on horseback and fishing for their food, using the skins of their prey for clothing and the birch trees and bark for building their canoes, baskets, and other necessities. Oroqen legends told that they had descended from bears of the forest, and their belief system was decidedly animistic.

The Oroqen people were engaged by the Qing Dynasty in the latter's campaigns against indigenous rulers (1639-43 CE), and later in the Sino-Russian Border Conflicts (1652-1689). As a result, the Oroqen began using muskets, and they became adept at riding and shooting in the forests of the Hinggan Mountains. This made them a great asset to the Qing armies, who frequently enlisted the Oroqen as fighters. Between 1895 and 1915, however, the Oroqen population fell from over 18,000 to just 4000. During the Second World War, the Oroqen fought valiantly against the Japanese, but by 1945, less than 1000 remained. They still lived as hunter-gatherers, practised shamanism, and spoke their own language (Oroqen), one of the approximately 20 languages of the endangered Tungusic language family spoken in Siberia and northern China.

In the 1950s, three things began to happen that would change their lives forever. The first development was China's need for natural resources for its industrialisation and modernisation program. Such resources included the trees that grew in abundance in the forest of the Hinggan Mountains. Soon, six large state-owned logging companies were active in the region, with potential access to 92 percent of the land ostensibly managed by the Oroqen nation. A further five percent was turned over to new collective farms.[1] The most immediate impact was the sudden influx of migrant workers into the region. Whereas in 1950, the Oroqen constituted a significant portion of the population, by 2000, this had fallen to less than one percent in the Autonomous region (2050 out of 297,400).[2] Another impact was the restricted access to hunting land and the decline in wildlife. The subsequent endangerment of species reinforces the decision to prohibit hunting altogether.

The second development was that the 'primitive' nomadic state of the Oroqen nation became the object of rescue from the central government, which supervised the 'three leaps towards modernisation,' as the museum calls them. The first, in 1951, was to establish it as an autonomous nation with its government recognised by the Chinese government – the first minority nation to be granted such status. The second leap, in 1958, was to bring them 'down from the mountains' and settle them into towns and villages, encouraging the development of agriculture. The final leap, in 1996, prohibited hunting and banned the possession of hunting guns. In return for abandoning their traditional way of life, the Oroqen gained access to health care, education, and the hitherto undreamed of (and undesired) consumer goods and services that the rest of modern civilisation enjoyed.

The third development was the effort of the Chinese government to support minority cultures. To avoid the dangers of separatism, China has emphasised an ideological narrative that emphasises minority contributions to a single multi-ethnic Chinese culture. This new narrative supports the building of a plethora of modern museums, including the three we visited in Alihe Township, which we describe in detail below.

Language

Oroqen has no written language.
In Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang province, we met Professor MENG Shuxian (孟淑贤 Mèng Shūxián) from the Department of National Affairs of Ethnic Minorities and Professor HAN Youfeng (韩友峰 Hán Yǒufēng) from the Research Institute for Interethnic Relations. A married couple, Han is in his eighties, and Meng is in her seventies. They are part of a rapidly diminishing group that grew up speaking Oroqen as their first language. Modestly, they described how they spent the best part of their lives on the preservation of the Oroqen language and culture. One result of their labours was to produce a phonetic version of the Oroqen language, as Chinese Pinyin produced sounds that did not accurately reflect their own. In 2019, they published the first Chinese-Oroqen dictionary.[3] The dictionary is crucial for recording and preserving the tales and legends that bind together Oroqen culture. Without the language, the stories would lose the distinctive lilt and modulation afforded by speech. The couple were, however, profoundly pessimistic over the language's chances for survival.

Oroqen is difficult for Chinese people to master since Mandarin (普通话 Pǔtōnghuà) is a tonal language, whereas Oroqen is not. Only one 'foreigner,' an American linguist, has mastered it. There were also difficulties in teaching a spoken language in schools. These problems were compounded by a lack of standard textbooks and adequately trained teachers. Additionally, outside one or two towns, Oroqen people were widely scattered such that young people leaving the area had little use for the language, whilst those remaining found themselves on islands of spoken Oroqen in a sea of Han Chinese. Moreover, traditional marriage patterns are eroding, with the result that mixed Oroqen-Han couples no longer prioritise learning the minority language. Finally, the native speakers are dying out, quite literally.

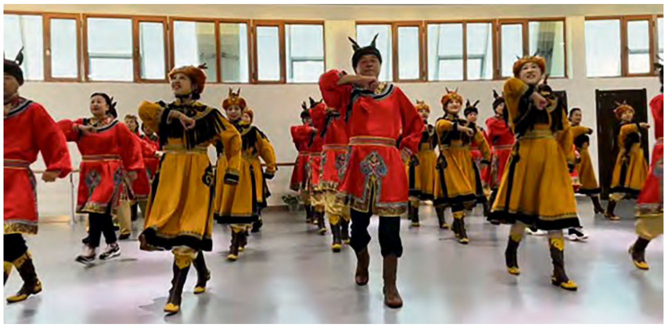

Fig. 2 (above): Oroqen performers showcased the 'horse-riding' dance in the rehearsal space at the Oroqen Intangible Heritage Museum, Alihe, Inner Mongolia. (Photo by Sarah Ward, 2023)

Heritage conservation

Alihe has three museums dedicated exclusively to the preservation of Oroqen culture. We were privileged to visit them and to talk with the directors and staff. The first museum we visited is the Oroqen Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum (阿里河鄂伦春民族非遗馆 Èlúnchūn zú guójiā fēi wùzhí wénhuà yíchǎn bówùguǎn), located in the central area of Alihe. The Oroqen Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum is housed in a beautiful purpose-built building that mimics the shape and form of the traditional Oroqen teepee-like tents, known as *sierranju* (斜仁柱 xiérénzhù) [Fig. 1]. With an area of over 3200 square meters, the museum functions as much as a cultural centre as a cultural museum.

The museum is divided into five parts: Forest Sea Hunters, Grab Economy, Traditional Crafts, Material Culture, and Spiritual Culture. The exhibition starts with a sequence of small, almost doll-like, glass cases displaying traditional Oroqen activities and structures. There are also one or two life-sized maquettes. Much of the rest of the exhibits are photographs and pieces of clothing made from treated animal hides and birch-bark artefacts, which visitors are encouraged to touch. We soon began to sense that we were in a different kind of museum. The exhibition space is devoted to the work of contemporary artists. The director's office resembled an art gallery filled with paintings. It was shared, no surprises, with two resident artists. Next to the museum space is a handicraft room where people can learn and practice traditional skills such as making birch-bark boxes or paper cutting. A small drive from the museum was an artisanal workshop where clothing, canoes, bows and arrows, and birch-bark boxes were all traditionally produced. The museum has also published a series of short videos on the Chinese social media sites WeChat and Duoyin, where they have over 37,000 followers.

The next day, in the dance studio on the second floor, we were treated to a rehearsal of the Oroqen dance [Fig. 2]. Six rows of five persons each performed two lively, energetic dances for us. The first was a hunting dance, the second a horse-riding dance. The performances are designed to mimic the traditional customs and way of life as a means of transmission. We were utterly impressed with the enthusiasm coursing

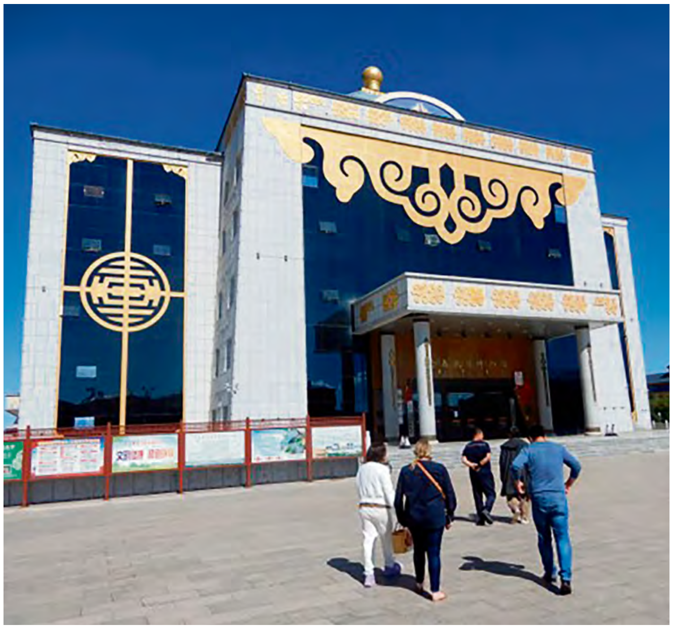

Fig. 3 (left): The Oroqen Ethnic Museum, Alihe, Inner Mongolia. (Photo by Richard Griffiths, 2023)

through everyone we met. Preserving the culture was in safe hands.

The second museum we visited, the Oroqen Ethnic Museum (鄂伦春民族博物馆 Èlúnchūn mínzú bówùguǎn), also called the Oroqen Nationality Museum, was located on the main square and was being renovated as we arrived [Fig. 3]. It was distinctly more traditional than the first, exhibiting many more full-sized recreations of scenes from Oroqen life. It also showcased artefacts that were both older and more numerous than those in the Oroqen Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum, all reinforced by contemporary photographs. At one point in the tour, visitors venture into a time-travel tunnel, not to the distant past of woolly mammoths, as we had expected, but to the 1950s and the first of the three steps to Oroqen modernisation, showing the nation's leaders and the local tribesmen and women seizing the new opportunities opening before them.

The third museum, the Tuoba Xianbei History Museum (拓跋鲜卑历史博物馆 Tùo bá xiānbēi lìshǐ bówùguǎn), is located some 10 kilometres outside of Alihe town centre in the forest conservation area near the Gaxian cave (嘎仙洞 Gāxiāndòng). The cave contains an inscription dating to 443 CE. It has been attributed to the Xianbei, the nomadic people who inhabited the area some 3000 years before and who, in three separate waves of migration, settled in the plains and established the foundations for the Northern Wei dynasty. The strikingly modern and beautifully designed museum is devoted to this story [Fig. 4].

All three museums displayed the exhibits in roomy, well-lit spaces. Display panels told the stories and the individual exhibits were labelled correctly. The local museum guides, dressed in traditional costumes, were well-trained and able to answer all questions addressed to them. The only drawback was that there was nothing in English – we were fortunate to have a friend with us who did all the translation.

The Oroqen nation faces three distinct yet interrelated challenges. The first is the critical need to safeguard traditional Oroqen animistic/forest-based culture in the face of globalisation, urbanisation, social transformation, and mass culture. The second is promoting the safeguarded culture to a broader public. The third challenge is to channel that wider interest into local economic activities that will keep the core communities intact. We will now examine each of these in turn.

Challenge #1: Safeguarding culture

Undeniably, the Oroqen culture is cut adrift from the natural context and rhythms that gave it its essential features. The nation no longer lives in extended family/clan groups, hunting, gathering, moving through the mountain forests according to the seasons, and retelling their myths and legends around communal fires. The preservation of their culture is doubly threatened by the erosion of the language in which it was originally expressed. In this respect, many of the first steps have already been taken. China ratified the UNESCO 2003 *Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* in 2004. Since then, the Oroqen language has been phonetically recorded and translated into Chinese, as have many traditional tales and songs. However, this must be more than the preparation for embalming a dying language. It has to be kept alive, which means maintaining a critical mass of the population using the language for communication among themselves, which, in turn, means creating sufficient opportunities for them to remain *in situ*. A second effort could be to raise the language's perceived status. It is a carrier of memory, but it could also be a means to creativity and expression. It does not need to be buried in the past. In Heihe, establishing a singing and dancing troupe has, for example, helped to keep the language alive. It is not just an opportunity to wallow in nostalgia; the troupe's performance schedules require members to learn the ancestral language and perform using it. Performances of traditional hunting songs (known as *zandaren*), love songs, narratives, and shamanic chants are all delivered in Oroqen. Changing the perception of the language may increase the incentive to study it and keep using it.

The material culture is in good hands, preserved in many museums. However, there are many ongoing threats to Oroqen culture – ageing practitioners, diminishing youth interest, material shortages, and industrialisation, to name a few. Therefore, its protection and safeguarding is about transferring knowledge, skills, and meaning to present and future generations. Per the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of achieving quality education (SDG4), the Oroqen Autonomous Banner Government works with many partners – all three museums, Professors Han and Meng, and community leaders and stakeholders – to strengthen and reinforce the diverse and varied processes necessary for the continuous evolution, interpretation, and transmission of Oroqen culture to future generations. The Oroqen Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum, for example, balances the retention of past practices, such as birch bark art, with the transmission of the modern techniques that are needed to adapt to the present. Free training courses help people experiencing poverty. One example of this is a new birch bark texture painting technique that preserves the traditional forms and texture, and still captures the spirit of the original. A second example is the recruitment of university fine art students to innovate and integrate this 3000-year-old traditional culture with modern fashion.

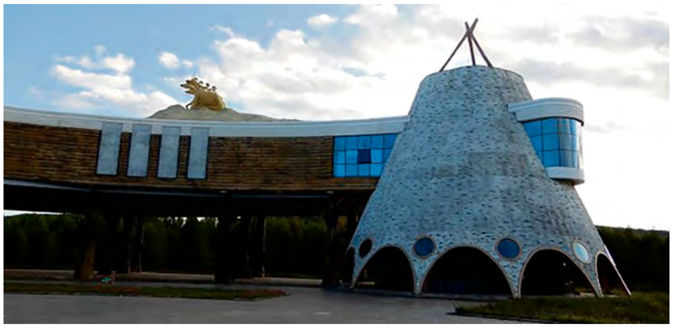

Fig. 4 (above): Tuoba Xianbei History Museum, Alihe, Inner Mongolia. (Photo by Richard Griffiths, 2023)

Challenge #2: Cultural promotion

The Oroqen Autonomous Banner has made great strides in protecting and safeguarding Oroqen cultural and natural heritage through the establishment of new museums and developing them with the help of the stakeholders and communities concerned. Recent research on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) conservation increasingly acknowledges that ICH has meaning for multiple stakeholders and is served best by integrating them into conservation processes. Including such stakeholders protects individuals' rights to identify, define, and decide upon their cultural heritage. Community engagement through participatory inclusion is seen as an essential key to reversing the current cultural decline. Although the Oroqen community has been successful in raising the profile of this endangered minority culture within China, they are also keenly aware of the need to provide learning opportunities for Oroqen stakeholders who have become disconnected from their culture.

Within China, the Oroqen internet presence is significant. All of the museums mentioned above have Weibo, Douyin, and WeChat accounts. None of the museums we visited have traditional websites, as it is considered old-fashioned in China to do so. Traditional websites' use (or not) will need to be reconsidered if the Oroqen are to engage an international audience. Official Government sites outline the history of the Oroqen people, mainly from their first contact in the Qing Dynasty. The websites showcase the traditional way of life, promoting the endangered Oroqen language, the birch bark culture, and traditional Oroqen clothing. However, raising awareness for its own sake is not sustainable. Promotion needs to be done in such a way as to stimulate economic growth and encourage sustainable development sufficient to provide income streams for all members of the community, many of whom remain in poverty.

Challenge #3: Local economic activity

Promoting the local economy, especially after the Covid lockdowns, is vital if the drift of youth away from the area is to be arrested. The most direct means of achieving this is through tourism. However, although the museums have all been upgraded, there is a shortage of hotel accommodation. At the same time, increasing the provision of hotel beds risks promoting the kind of mass tourism that can destroy the very integrity of the experience offered. Equally, without ancillary attractions, like adventure rides or an 'authentic' amusement park, there is little to attract most Chinese tourists to such a remote area.

Foreign tourists may provide a more discerning source of demand, attracted by the unique culture and the beautiful scenery, though this poses other difficulties. Individual foreign tourism is not well developed. Only one tour operator in Harbin is licenced to bring foreign tourists to Oroqen. A Malaysian group was there at the same time we were. However, they had some challenges with the guide and vowed not to return. For this reason, the Oroqen leaders are developing an Oroqen-led tour company, which will operate at a standard expected by international visitors, with a bilingual guide and control of the narrative. In this sense, it means that the Oroqen people can tell their own story in their own way, and the profits will stay in the community and support those who need it the most.

If it is a couple of years before international travellers can experience Oroqen hospitality, they can at least be coaxed into buying local artisanal products. Thus, in addition to serving to promote the local culture, the internet could provide a channel for online purchasing – not only the birch-bark boxes already on offer as souvenirs but also bespoke clothing (already offered to customers), paintings by local artists, as well as CDs and DVDs of their music and dances. In addition, translations of the already existing illustrated storybooks could introduce the nation's adventures and legends to a broader international audience.

Final reflection

The Oroqen have a rich and unique culture. Modern economic development is threatening its very survival. Ironically, though, modern communications technology may offer the way to ensuring its ultimate preservation. In the hands of the current leadership, they have the energy and the drive to make that happen.

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Email: sarahward@dlmu.edu.cn

Notes

[1] p. 354, Zhou, Y. and Lundberg, M., 2009. Hunting-Prohibition in the Hunters' Autonomous Area: Legal Rights of Oroqen People and the Implementation of Regional National Autonomy Law. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 16(3), pp. 349-397

[2] Wang, X., 2022. A Study on the Endangered Language: Saving the Oroqen Language of Northern China. *International Journal of Linguistics Studies*, 2(2), pp.82-89.

[3] 韩有峰/孟淑贤 2019 鄂伦春语汉语词典。北方文艺出版社： 哈尔滨 hán yǒufēng/mèng shūxián 2019 èlúnchūn yǔ hànyǔ cídiǎn. Běifāng wényì chūbǎn shè: Hā'ěrbīn (Han, Y. and Meng, S. 2019 Chinese Dictionary of Oroqen Language. Northern Literature and Art Publishing House: Harbin)

Afro-Ásia

A Biannual Journal of the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil

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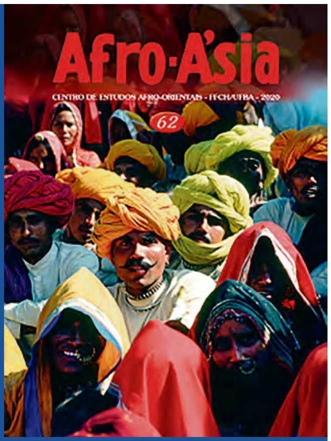

In a bid to expand the Brazilian conversation in the field of Asian Studies, and to better engage with a more international research agenda, Afro-Ásia invites scholars at any level of their career development, from any part of the world, to submit original, full-breadth research articles, theoretical and methodological essays, or historiographical balances from any area of the social sciences and humanities that represent a significant contribution to the scholarly debate.

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strengthen the Brazilian conversation
on Asian Studies!

The journal was founded in 1965, as the scientific divulgation vehicle of the Center for Afro-Oriental Studies (CEAO), established in 1959 in the wake of the Bandung Conference and at the onset of African decolonization. CEAO was the first Brazilian academic institution of its genre, and it was made possible by the convergence of multiple interests, from state agencies to social collective actors. In fact, the state of Bahia, with its roughly 80 percent African-descent population, had since the beginning of the 20th century been a hotspot for the making of a transnational research field on race relations and Afro-American culture. From the 1930s and well into the 1960s, a host of foreign scholars, especially American and French, came to Bahia to study Black neighborhood and religious communities, looking for 'African survivals' and profoundly intrigued by the local racial convivial mores that presented such a stark contrast to US segregation. Bahian scholars, some of them Black or mixed-race, had entered the field since its inception and tried to carve out spaces for the organic intellectuals of the Black community – namely, female religious leaders of *Candomblé* – to be properly heard and considered in academic venues such as the Second Afro-Brazilian Congress, held in Salvador in 1937. Boosted by the post-war economic boom, which in Brazil was paired with a democratic interstice, Bahian scholars with links to leftist parties or *Candomblé* houses came together with Portuguese humanist and political exile Agostinho da Silva, who was in touch with anticolonial activists from Portuguese-speaking African countries. Together, they established CEAO as a specialized agency within the state public university.

The Brazilian government was then trying a more independent foreign-relations policy, abandoning its traditional automatic alignment with the United States and reaching out to key actors in the emerging Third World, such as Cuba, China, India, or Indonesia. Thus, funding for an academic center that could help government officials to better understand the frenzy developments in Asia and Africa became available, and that small group of intellectuals in Bahia took their opportunity to design the first university mobility programs with the African continent. Early researchers affiliated with CEAO spent long research stays in different African countries, some of them even pursuing masters and doctorates, which were still rare in Brazil at the time. CEAO also hosted the first African university students in Brazil, by means of a pioneering initiative that would later serve as a model for the main Brazilian official scholarship program for foreign undergraduate and graduate students, directed at candidates from what we today call the 'Global South.' Moreover, Yoruba and Japanese language classes, open to the general public, were regularly offered from the 1970s and 1980s. Soon, the center was also recognized as a focal point of articulation for anti-racist struggles in Brazil, especially due to its always intense dialogue with *Candomblé* communities, the Black movement, and its organic intellectuals. *Afro-Ásia* was regularly published until 1970, facing thereafter an extended period of institutional fragility with only a few editions spaced along the years. From 1995 on, the journal managed to retake its regular publication frequency and established itself as one of the most important venues for Brazilian academic conversations on the African Diaspora, Africa, and Asia, reaching out to Spanish-speaking Latin America, where it also has a significant reader base.

Needless to say, the interest in Asia has always been a secondary concern for both CEAO and the Brazilian research community at large, in part because of the prohibitive costs involved in doing research in Asian countries and a faltering funding strategy by the Brazilian government through subsequent regime changes. Of course, *Afro-Ásia* vied to bring discussions about Asia to its readers in Brazil, translating a number of research articles by established foreign researchers, most of them Westerners. Published pieces ranged from more exoticizing, Orientalist perspectives on themes such as literature in Sanskrit or the Noh theater, to reflections on pressing contemporary issues such as the Afro-Asian solidarity movement, Gandhi's political philosophy, Nehru's ideals for a new international order, and Sino-Indian frontier disputes. However, a recognizable, institutionalized academic field of Asian Studies has yet to emerge in Brazil. Certainly, beyond the initial interest in Asian decolonization and political affirmation in the world arena, a growing number of research themes has been developing along the last decades, sometimes stemming from emigrated Asian-descent communities present in major Brazilian cities, particularly the national economic metropolis, São Paulo, where university courses on particular Asian matters are offered more regularly. A certain number of scholars in literary studies, history, geography, sociology, and anthropology have consistently built their careers as specialists in Asian Studies, and many are now actively involved in teaching and supervising a potential new generation of researchers throughout the country. The general interest in Asia is on the rise, pushed by China's and India's economic puissance, their ever-expanding global reach, as well as considerations about the role of Brazil in affirming the agency of the Global South and forging South-South cooperation initiatives and strategic partnerships.

In recent years, this growing Brazilian interest in Asia has been reflected in the issues of *Afro-Ásia*, which has assumed the mission of supporting and helping to consolidate Asian Studies made in Brazil. Understandably, contemporary China and India, Brazilian partners in the BRICS coalition, concentrate much of the scholarly gaze, but other spaces are also starting to attract the focus of Brazilian researchers. In this special section of The Region, we feature some examples of the varied interests – in terms of methodological, empirical, and geographical framing – that have recently appeared in our pages.

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How Many Hands Does It Take to Write History of Literature? The Politics of Theoretical Divergences in Indonesia

Felipe Vale da Silva

While searching for the origins of modern Indonesian literature, we come across a recurrent formulation: "modern Indonesian literature was born around 1920." Such an assumption leads back to Dutch colonial scholar Andries Teeuw's book *Pokok dan Tokoh* (1952), and it is fair to say that it has been accepted as a historical fact ever since. Accordingly, natives of what was then called the Dutch East Indies developed their literary expression due to the exertion of the educational policies of the Dutch crown, especially after the 1901 reform package known as *Ethische politiek*. The new colonial code not only aimed at spreading knowledge amongst natives, but also created an official publishing house called Balai Pustaka, whose goal was to monitor the 'proper' literary material made available for local populations.

For this article, we analyzed newly-found documents that reveal the imperial goals and institutional structure of the Balai Pustaka: being directly connected to the colonial agency Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur, it performed the dual role of a Ministry of Education and Ministry of Propaganda in the Indies. The main goal was to convey Western concepts of cognition to indigenous populations, thereby outlining and establishing values, behavioral models, and new ranges of social functions. Thusly, a significant part of Balai Pustaka's activities consisted in translating classics of Western literature into local languages. In the 1920s, it provided institutional support to native writers based in Sumatra, the same who wrote the classics of modern Indonesian expression, who were later named the Balai Pustaka literary school.

For this new literary school, the awakening of a modern conscience necessarily involved abandoning the *adat*, the customary norms that guide indigenous conduct within a given community. It involved replacing tradition for European values – in fact, most materials sponsored by Balai Pustaka portrayed the dilemmas faced by educated natives living under the new 'Associationist' regime. Marah Rusli's *Sitti Nurbaya* (1922), for instance, is a privileged picture of the period's context due to its clear-cut use of epochal stereotypes. The coming-of-age style of narrative portrays a Westernized young native struggling against regressive tribal lifestyles; indigenous life soon stops being harmonious and transforms into a life of pointless observance to traditional roles and obscurantism. Here a new Indies society is symbolized by this young man who dares to question tradition and to behave like a Dutchman – even though tribal politics hinder his personal ambitions, his example is set in paper for future readers. He is a martyr of the incomplete modernization of the Indies, so to speak.

Not all Balai Pustaka novels are pro-Associationism, though. Abdul Muis' *Salah Asuhan* (1928) is a surprisingly pessimistic portrayal of the Westernizing tendencies of the time over impressionable young men. The book guides us to a poorly explored facet of anticolonial thinking during the Balai Pustaka era. The institution's policies had many implications: one that ended up creating a monopoly over the Indonesian editorial market and stifling dissident authors and groups. Thus, examining the institution helps with the project of historical reinterpretation about the origins of literary modernity in Indonesia.

The full Portuguese-language version of this article originally appeared in *Afro-Ásia* under the title "Ficções históricas de Timor-Leste: tempo, violência e gênero na produção fílmica pós-independência" (n. 62, 2020, pp. 270-298). Available at https://periodicos.ufba.br/index.php/afroasia/article/view/35873

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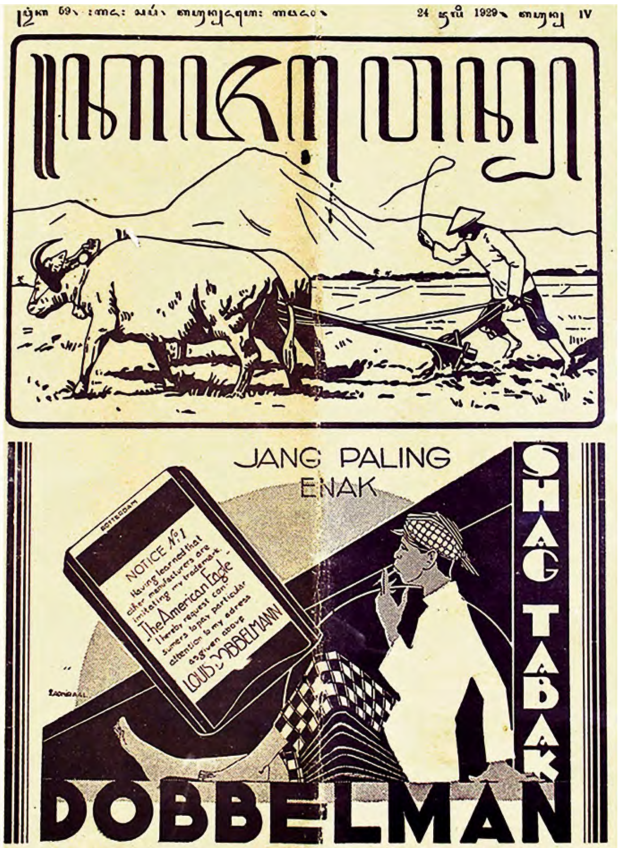
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ENAK
SHAG TABAK
NOTICE No 1
Having learned that other manufacturers are imitating my trademark
The American Eagle
I hereby request consumers to pay particular attention to my adress as given above
LOUIS DOBBELMANN
ROTTERDAM
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Fig. 2 (above): Javanese-language magazine *Majalah Kajawen*, monitored by Balai Pustaka personnel, bringing translations of everything from Western literature classics to medical advice, Islamic prayers to advertising, second issue, 1928. (Photo by the author, 2020)

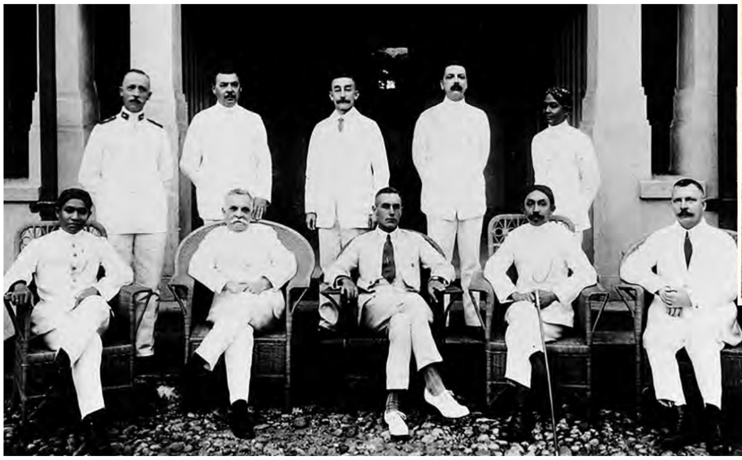

Fig. 3 (left): Active members of Balai Pustaka: the new face of Dutch Associationism in the mid-1920s. (Photo courtesy of the Rinkes family, https://rinkes.nl/genealogie/douwe-adolf-rinkes/balai-poestaka)

Historical Fictions in East Timor: Time, Violence and Gender in Post-Independence Film Production

Daniel De Lucca

The article discusses film production in and about Timor-Leste in direct connection with its political history. In an environment strongly marked by oral culture, where the literate world speaks little to citizens, the conditions of film production also involve a limited socio-technical network for the creation and distribution of films. Audiovisual consumption is often hindered by serious infrastructural problems, such as access to electricity, especially outside of the capital, Díli. Also, scarce public funding means that the audiovisual sponsors are typically private individuals and foreigners, promoting productions under international and inter-institutional cooperation regimes. I make a contrapuntal reading of three international award-winning historical fictions – *Answered by Fire* (2006), *Balibo* (2009), and *A Guerra da Beatriz* (2013) – as artifacts of the Timorese imagination that objectify social processes, interpreting, recreating, and fixing them in image and sound devices, in order to question their effects and conditions of possibility. The meanings and consequences of transforming the history of the liberation struggle into fiction films are examined, considering that many professionals involved in the films discussed had their lives directly affected by the historical events portrayed. The narrative strategies for constructing time, violence, and gender constitute key categories that serve as a guide in film analysis.

It is important to take into account the international connections involved in these productions. These are narratives whose creation reveals exchanges and commitments with international agencies and agents, which has allowed the Timorese filmmakers an amplified visibility in worldwide circles. They convey the image of other nations, positioning them (and East Timor itself) in a space of global representations. Australia appears as an important place of production, training, and technical cooperation in the audiovisual field, while Indonesia (which occupied East Timor from 1975 to 1999) appears as an antagonistic, imperial other. In its turn, Portugal (the former colonial power) does not emerge as a narrative reference whatsoever; neither are the Portuguese conceived as part of the intended audience. This suggests that regional powers have acquired more importance, inside and outside the films, than that of the old European colonial power.

With the exception of *A Guerra da Beatriz*, the films have a recurring theme of the protection and international aid provided to the Timorese. This theme relates to the West continuing to see and imagine East Timor mostly through the lens of victimization, necessity, and assistance. If *Answered by Fire* highlights the challenges met by UN peacekeeping officials in the field, *Balibo* follows the death of Australian journalists in the context of the Indonesian invasion in 1975. *A Guerra da Beatriz*, in turn, practically does not feature any mediation with the West. In this landmark of national cinema, released as "East Timor's First Feature Film," the external perspective is radically subverted, giving way to an emerging and distinctive point of view – non-Eurocentric, non-Díli-centric, and non-phallocentric – where women from rural areas are presented not through the customary tropes of insufficiency and precariousness, but rather as social beings full of integrity and agency. After tracking important moments in the birth of both the nation and the Timorese cinema, this study highlights the deep links existing in East Timor between audiovisual production and historical imagination, not only in projections about the past but also in expectations about the future.

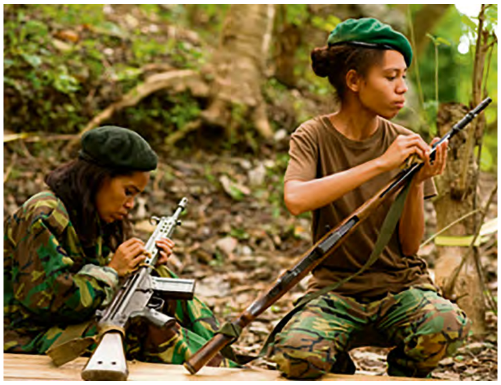

Fig. 1 (above): Beatriz (Irim Torentino) and Teresa (Augusta Soares), sisters-in-law and guerrillas in *A Guerra de Beatriz*. (Screen print by the author, 2018)

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The Colonizers' Spoils: The *Zanryu-Hojin* Exiled between Politics and Society

André Saraiva Santos

After the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, the puppet state of Manchukuo was established. Japanese imperialists promised a 'Paradise on Earth' to counter Communism and the West. To build this 'Paradise,' the Yamato race was to lead other Asian ethnicities. Facing a shortage of colonists, Manchukuo's propaganda targeted the surplus rural, impoverished population in Japan. 'To Manchuria!!' (満洲へ!!), echoed the call: the 'promised land' was near (樂土滿洲近し). One million peasants, persuaded or coerced, were dispatched to remote *kaitakudans* (開拓團, agricultural settlements) along the Siberian border.

Amid the Pacific War, Japan recruited soldiers from Manchukuo, leaving a skeletal garrison in the region. The worsening situation favored the Soviets, who invaded Manchuria in August 1945. Instead of warning Japanese settlers, the Kwantung Army (关东军) sponsored mass suicide. Those who did not commit *harakiri* or die during the confrontations became 'refugee-hostages,' facing inhumane conditions under Soviet control. Japanese women in 'refugee-hostage' camps were coerced into sexual relations with Soviet soldiers for supplies. The camps became markets for cheap labor and advantageous marriage agreements for Chinese farmers. Many women saw in it a way out, avoiding collective rapes, diseases, hunger, and death. Kidnappings of Japanese children were also common. Nine months after Manchukuo's fall, in May 1946, the Japanese government began repatriation policies, generically categorizing those left behind as *zanryu-hojin* (殘留邦人, literally "remaining Japanese"). Girls over 13 were labeled as "remaining women" (*zanryu-fujin*, 残留婦人) implying that they had chosen to stay and should, therefore, not enter the repatriation process. Other women who managed to disembark in Japan were subjected to 'racial cleansing' operations. The state enforced biopolitics, forcing abortions to prevent racial contamination and barring entry into the country of women married to a male foreigner.

As Sino-Japanese relations worsened in May 1958, the 30,000 'missing' Japanese in China were politically killed by Tokyo in official registries – another step toward gradual oblivion. During the Maoist era, the *zanryu-hojin* concealed or self-suppressed their Japanese identity. Despite normalized relations in 1972 between the PRC and Japan, as far as Tokyo was concerned, the *zanryu-hojin* issue could remain in the shadows of history. It did not work out that way, largely due to the civil initiative prompted by Yamamoto Jisho (山本慈) in Japan and the requests of orphans in the Japanese embassy in China to find a solution for their predicament. From 1981 to 1985, timid efforts were made to reunite the *zanryu-hojin* with their Japanese families. By 1986, only 37.8 percent had found relatives, and from 1986 to 2007, just 31 percent of the reclaimants got positive family identifications. We can understand Tokyo's reluctance in terms of a strategy to let the issue run out of steam by constantly stalling until everybody caught up in the failed actions in Manchuria was dead.

Those who completed repatriation were confronted with the hardships of illiteracy and language difficulties, which undermined their full integration into Japanese families. They found precarious, poorly paid, and harsh conditions in their struggle for economic survival. For a long time, and as part of the repatriation policy designed by Tokyo, the *zanryu-hojin* needed a guarantor (not always available or willing), which reinforced the 'dependent' status of the newly-arrived 'Chinese-Japanese.' After all, they had to leave behind one or more members of their Manchurian families to return to Japan. Subalternity and exilic existence were the state of normality conferred on these once-useful individuals by the post-imperialistic State, a State that constantly tried to erase them even from the fringes of history, alongside the shame of a defeated Empire.

The full Portuguese-language version of this article originally appeared in *Afro-Ásia* under the title "Despojos do colonizador: os zanryu-hojin exilados entre a política e a sociedade" (n. 61, 2020, pp. 191-227). Available at https://periodicos.ufba.br/index.php/afroasia/article/view/31885

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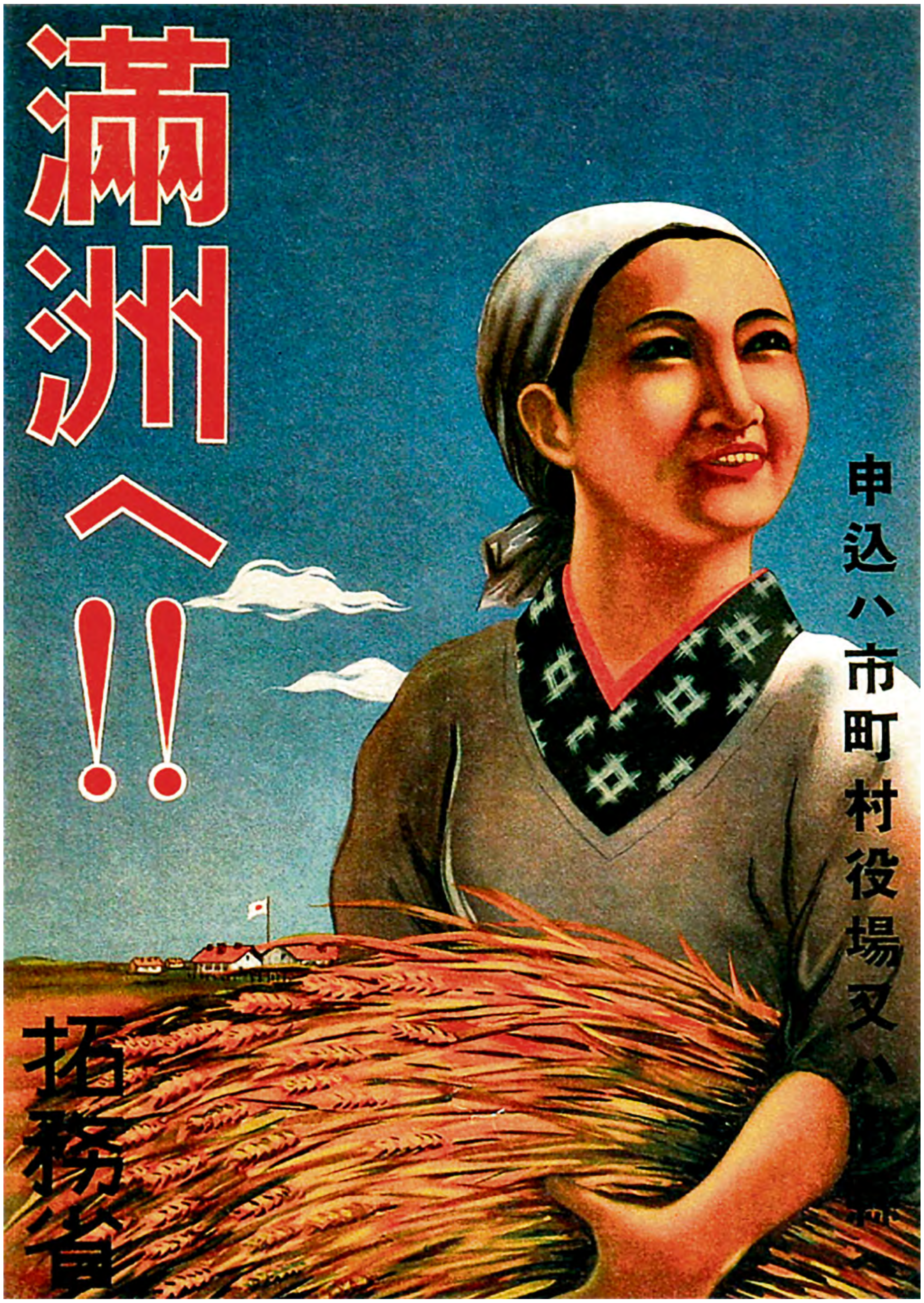
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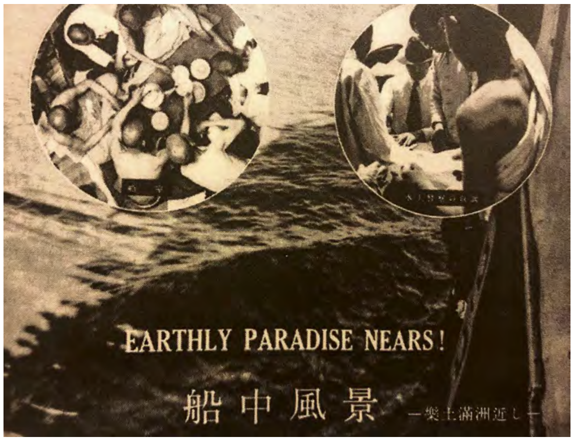

Fig. 1 (above): Japanese poster aimed at attracting peasants to migrate to Manchuria. (Poster produced by the Japanese Ministry of Colonial Affairs, available at Wikimedia Commons)

Fig. 2 (below): Japanese poster portraying Manchukuo as an 'Earthly Paradise.' (Reprinted in Annika A. Culver, *Glorify the Empire: Japanese Avant-Garde Propaganda in Manchukuo.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, p. 113: Manchuria graph. August 1938, *Yumani Shobô* 2008 reprint, Duke University Perkins-Bostock Library Collection)

Asian Studies in Greece

Kostas Tsimonis

One of the first lessons that students of Asian Studies receive is that Asia as a geographic area and as an object of study are quite separate things. Although the term "Oriental" – not to mention "Far East" – is rightfully abandoned due to its colonial load, the preferred term "Asian" does not seem to solve the problem. "Asia" as a geographically delineated interdisciplinary area of study remains an impossibility. The size and diversity of the continent render overarching "Asian" expertise unfeasible. Even the widely accepted omission of Russia from Asian Studies – despite it being the biggest Asian country with approximately one-third of the continent's landmass – still leaves us with a myriad of distinct regions.

Fig. 1 (above): Border bridge between Greece and Turkey at Pythio. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons user Reinhard Dietrich, 2007)

The impossibility of Asia as an academic field means that Asian Studies around the globe focus on different Asian regions. The development and trajectory of Asian Studies within a country ultimately reflects the predominant local understanding and conceptualisation of "Asia" as shaped historically by political, economic, and social factors. In many Western European nations, Asian Studies emerged primarily out of a need to cultivate administrators for sprawling colonial empires. In these nations, the study of Asian cultures, languages, and societies was essential for maintaining and managing colonial interests in Asia. Similarly, in former communist countries, the imperatives of foreign policy and central planning during the Cold War played pivotal roles in establishing university departments dedicated to the study of languages such as Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean. Students were assigned to immerse themselves to the study of these countries, enabling a deeper understanding of these regions that would serve state interests. Thus, the forces of colonialism and communism were instrumental in propelling state-driven initiatives to develop Asian Studies in Europe. These developments reflected the geopolitical and strategic interests of the respective states in understanding and engaging with Asian countries. Their experiences also highlight the indispensable role of the state in developing new academic fields.

In Greece, a nation unmarked by either colonialism or communism, perceptions of Asia have predominantly been shaped by its historical arch-rival, Turkey. Despite their contentious history, these two nations share a common ancestry of statehood, tracing back to the eras of the Ottoman Empire and Byzantium. However, they have developed opposing nationalisms which are sustained (and sustain) geopolitical rivalries. In this context, the study of Turkey has become paramount in the Greek international relations discipline, a field introduced in the 1990s by a cadre of scholars primarily trained in the United States and United Kingdom.

International Relations (IR) in Greece has expanded significantly over the past three to four decades, largely shaped by immediate foreign policy concerns. The primary concern has been to delineate responses to Turkey's rise as a regional powerhouse. Turkey is now recognised for its immense strategic value to the United States and NATO, its large economy, and its sophisticated and battlefield-proven military. The rise of Turkey necessitated a keen understanding and analysis of its regional ambitions and strategies. Thus, Greek IR scholars and political scientists have cultivated a robust community of Turkologists, producing a wealth of scholarly work interlaced with policy recommendations. These recommendations focus on strategies for Greece to contain Turkey's expansionist ambitions in the Aegean Sea and Cyprus and to counterbalance its quest for regional supremacy. This scholarly and policy-oriented discourse seeks not only to comprehend the evolving dynamics, but also to equip Greece with nuanced approaches to manage difficult relations with its historical neighbour and rival.

As a result, in Greece, the academic exploration of Turkey has predominantly evolved within departments of international relations and political science. The growth and development of area studies, focusing on the detailed examination of Turkey in terms of its geography, culture, languages, and history, have been comparatively slower to progress and mature. The IR perspective has taken precedence, addressing Turkey's foreign policies, strategic importance, and its relations with Greece and other nations. Meanwhile, the comprehensive multidisciplinary approach intrinsic to area studies has taken a backseat in the Greek academic landscape.

Today, there are 11 departments on IR and politics in Greece, all offering modules related to Turkish politics or foreign policy. There are only two departments with an interdisciplinary, area studies approach: (1) the Department of Turkish and Modern Asian Studies in the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, and (2) the Department of Balkan, Slavic & Oriental Studies in the University of Macedonia. The former was established in 2003 and envisioned the creation of two pathways, one on Turkish Studies and one on East Asia (hence "Modern Asian Studies"). However, in the two decades of its operation, only the Turkish pathway has been realised and offered. Similarly, the Oriental Studies component at the University of Macedonia covers primarily Turkey and, secondarily, the Middle East. The number of Greek academic positions on "Asian Studies" beyond Turkey or the Middle East is miniscule.

The Greek economic crisis (2010-2018) had a heavy impact on the opening of new academic fields. Because universities in the country are public, they are forbidden from using undergraduate tuition fees for income and depend almost completely on the state for their operation and development. During the crisis, university hires were essentially put on hold for almost a decade, salaries were reduced by approximately 40 percent, and funding for higher education was barely sufficient to cover the operational expenses of universities. Social sciences and humanities encountered even graver challenges compared to STEM subjects, which could still attract funding from the private sector. This has resulted in a substantial generational "gap" of early- to mid-career scholars – typically those in their late 30s and 40s – that remains evident today. As Greek universities are still grappling with the myriad negative legacies of the economic crisis, prioritising the field of Asian Studies is not currently high on their agenda.

The shy development of Chinese studies

As noted above, the emergence of Asian Studies in Europe has, to some extent, been driven by contingency, a notion that can also be used to explain the development of Chinese studies in Greece. However, a distinctive feature in the Greek context is the conspicuous absence of financial support from the Greek state. Instead, the initiative to fill this void has been undertaken by the People's Republic of China (PRC), which pursues a very active cultural and educational diplomacy in the country.

In Greece, the development of Confucius Institutes (CIs) commenced in parallel with gradual entry of COSCO – the Chinese state's shipping company – into the Port of Piraeus in 2009. Initially, a Business Confucius Institute was inaugurated at the Athens University of Economics and Business (2009). This was succeeded by the establishment of Confucius Institutes at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2018) and at the University of Thessaly (2019). In July 2023, a fourth CI, specialising in Traditional Chinese Medicine was instituted at the University of West Attica. Although the primary focus of the CIs is language training, some have also broadened their scope to include public lectures on culture, economic issues, and international relations, featuring Chinese speakers. In addition, the World Sinology Centre, a PRC state-controlled institution is in talks with Ionian University to open a branch to lead the development of Sinology in the country. A more synergetic project is the Centre for the Study of Ancient Greek and Chinese Civilisation, inaugurated in 2023. This centre, funded by both the EU and the PRC, brings together a consortium of Greek universities with Chinese partners to study and disseminate ancient philosophy through a joint degree programme and other initiatives. Thus far, Chinese Studies in Greece has been intimately connected to and dependent on state institutions and funding of the PRC.

PRC-independent Chinese Studies programmes in Greece are primarily confined to social science universities and are mostly limited to a handful of modules offered to undergraduate students. (The author has identified only three within the whole of Greek academia.) Notably, the Department of International, European and Area Studies at Panteion University was the first to introduce an undergraduate module on Chinese politics in 2014, and its library has since developed the richest collection on modern China in the country. Furthermore, the Institute of International Relations, also at Panteion, has hosted an annual Chinese Studies Seminar since 2020 and a language programme for political scientists since 2021. In 2023, IDIS launched a programme to develop the field in collaboration with American, European, and East Asian universities. Social sciences delve into topics that experience stringent censorship in the PRC (e.g., human rights, minority rights, authoritarian governance, etc.), rendering financial and intellectual independence from China's autocratic regime crucial for preserving academic freedom.

Despite the intensification of Sino-Greek economic relations, no Greek government has recognised the necessity for domestic and independent expertise on China. Rather, at the state level, nearly all initiatives related to China-focused education have been entrusted to various actors from the PRC, which often have a deeply problematic record that ranges from inefficiency and corruption to violation of academic freedom and espionage. Greek social scientists endeavour to conduct research on China in a manner that maintains academic freedom and integrity. However, they face limited sources of support and a Greek state that is chronically indifferent.

To conclude, the current state of Asian Studies beyond the study of Turkey is regrettably almost non-existent in Greece. This creates missed opportunities for young scholars and also leaves the nation vulnerable in its dealings with Asian powers due to a lack of expertise. As the case of Chinese Studies shows, the absence of domestic knowledge production leaves a void that is likely to be filled by external actors, whose interests are inclined to serve their own agendas rather than Greek universities or society at large. What is more, without a concerted effort to bolster Asian Studies within the nation, Greece undermines its agency in international relations, compromising both its national interests and its potential contribution to global affairs.

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Trendsetters of Islam

Examining emerging mediums of religious exchange

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Over the last decade, Islam in Southeast Asia has encountered significant changes. The impact of radicalism from the global ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) movement attracted some sympathizers from the region. However, aside from the security lens, there are other aspects from which Islam in Southeast Asia can be analyzed. Various trends have emerged which call for a different approach to studying developments in the region. First, the use of social media and the Internet for Islamic preaching has become common, transcending traditional mediums such as mosques and madrasahs. COVID-19, which led to lockdowns and mosque closures, forced religious classes to shift to online domains. Second, middle-class Muslims are also emerging and making their voices heard on Islamic matters, challenging the authority of traditional *ulama*. Third, Islamic NGOs are also losing their monopoly in representing Muslims. They have been overtaken by popular preachers who do not require institutional resources and backing to present their thoughts in the public sphere.

Focusing on these emerging trends, the Regional Social and Cultural Studies programme at ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute has embarked on a study of trendsetters of Islam in Southeast Asia, examining emerging mediums of religious exchanges, popular religious personalities, and contemporary Islamic discourses beyond terrorism. The articles below are some of the research outputs of ISEAS fellows working on these topics, and the ones selected here focus on how personalities impact politics, religion, and society. The articles were originally published in *Fulcrum*, an opinion-editorial website run by ISEAS to showcase commentaries on current events. The articles selected discuss case studies from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand

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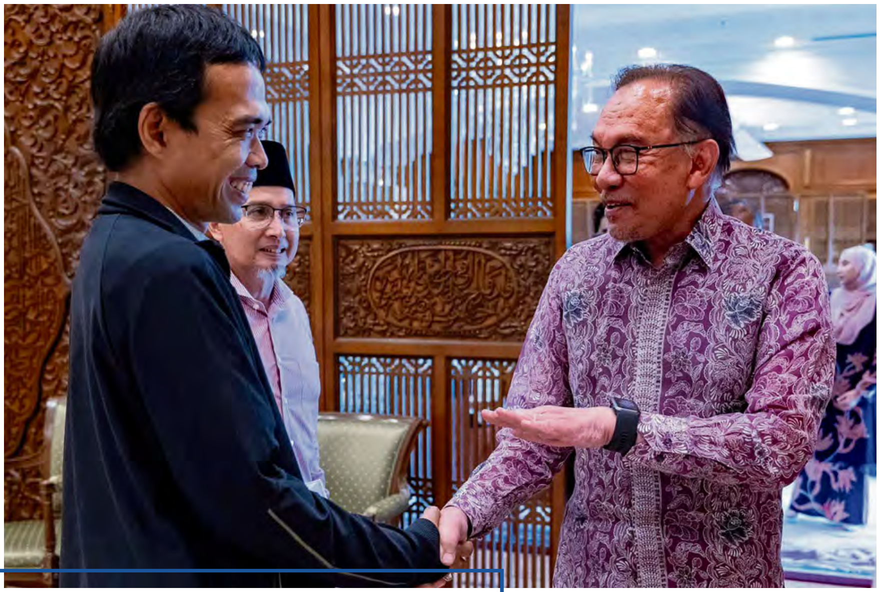

Fig. 1: Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim welcomes Ustaz Abdul Somad at Putrajaya.
(Photo from Anwar Ibrahim/Facebook)

Anwar Ibrahim Welcomes Abdul Somad to Putrajaya: What Gives?

Mohd Faizal Musa and Afra Alatas

On 13 July 2023, Indonesian preacher Abdul Somad Batubara visited Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and apparently stayed for an hour's conversation.[1] Commonly referred to as Ustaz Abdul Somad (or UAS), the controversial preacher has been barred from entering several countries, including being denied entry into Singapore on 16 May 2022.[2] This is due to his extremist views, which include espousing physical violence and animosity towards non-Muslims.[3]

While the Singapore government's actions were perceived by some Muslims as Islamophobic,[4] other countries including Hong Kong, Timor Leste, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Switzerland, have also barred Abdul Somad from crossing their borders.[5] This reflects the wariness with which several governments regard his questionable teachings and views.

Views such as Abdul Somad's should be antithetical to a multi-religious society like Malaysia. It is thus surprising that Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim so warmly welcomed such a controversial preacher to Putrajaya. In our view, this incident can be seen as a self-inflicted shot in the foot to Anwar's framework of Malaysia Madani, which he has touted as the foundation for a more progressive Malaysia that embraces diversity and respect for all, among other core principles.

What is more, Malaysia seemingly welcomed Abdul Somad with open arms. Not only did he go straight from the airport to Putrajaya to meet Anwar, posting on social media about how he spent an hour with Anwar in his office,[6] but Abdul Somad also made a courtesy call to Malacca Governor Mohd Ali Rustam.[7] He stayed on to lecture at Dataran Sejarah, Ayer Keroh, at a celebration commemorating the Islamic new year. Abdul Somad's presence was said to have triggered a "tsunami of believers," pulling in about 50,000 attendees.[8] In the same audience were Mohd Ali Rustam, other state government officials, and local preachers.

It was not the first time that Abdul Somad visited Malaysia. In 2019, he visited Kelantan, Kuala Lumpur, and Negeri Sembilan in February, and Sabah in September. A quick survey of comments on his Instagram posts about this year's visit shows his followers in Indonesia lamenting that he is poorly received in his own country but treated with respect and admiration elsewhere. The fact that Indonesia's government views one of its own citizens with some suspicion should speak for itself.

On 14 July, Abdul Somad lectured at Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque in Shah Alam, Selangor. In the audience was Tengku Permaisuri Hajah Norashikin, the queen consort of the Sultan of Selangor. Preachers, whether local or foreign, are required to obtain a licence from a state's Islamic Religious Council, which is headed by the Malay ruler before they can preach in a given state. Thus, this lecture was clearly sanctioned by the top state leadership.

Abdul Somad also visited a naval fleet in Lumut, Perak, gave an evening lecture to 36,000 people at a stadium in Perak and delivered another lecture in one of the state's mosques. Upon his return to Kuala Lumpur on 15 July, he gave an evening lecture at Dataran Merdeka dressed in traditional Malay gear. The symbolism of the traditional dress (*tanjak*) may be interpreted by some as a nod to more conservative or even right-wing groups in Malaysia.

Abdul Somad's time in Malaysia was a grand affair from start to end. He met not just the foremost Malaysian leader but even royalty and other politicians. On the day of his departure, 16 July, Abdul Somad received a grand farewell, leaving on a private jet arranged by a Malaysian aviation firm.

Reflecting on his meeting with Abdul Somad, Anwar stated that they "agreed on the importance of preaching about Islam in a manner that is based on moderation and wisdom."[9] However, Anwar's emphasis on "moderation" is clearly at odds with the well-known extremist views Abdul Somad espouses.

It is highly unlikely that Anwar is ignorant about the controversy that surrounds Abdul Somad. Aside from legitimising the use of violence against and referring to non-Muslims as infidels (a derogatory usage of *kafir*), Abdul Somad's other views include supporting an Islamic caliphate and the implementation of hudud law, prohibiting Muslims from wishing Christians a "Merry Christmas," and dismissing dialogue between Sunnis and Shi'as as void due to the perceived fundamental differences between the sects.[10]

The six core principles of Malaysia Madani are sustainability, prosperity, innovation, respect, trust, and compassion. These are useful guiding principles, but other aspects of the framework might be inaccessible to the Malay/Muslim masses. For example, the Majlis Ilmu Madani lecture series, aimed at explaining the meaning of a Madani nation to the Malaysian masses, is spearheaded by international Islamic scholars who are almost unknown to the audience. The ideas in these lectures run contrary to more conservative ideas which have taken root in local discourses, which belies the lectures' effectiveness.

Ironically, with his open welcome to Abdul Somad, Anwar might have further jeopardised the strength and popularity of his Madani framework. By embracing a preacher whose values are starkly opposed to the values that Malaysia Madani promotes – and one whose speech and sermons lack religious depth but encourage inter-religious conflict – Anwar might be playing with fire. It is a puzzle that Malaysia's prime minister seemingly endorsed this preacher, even if Abdul Somad may have ardent followers among certain segments of the country's Muslim population.

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Notes

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Fig. 1: Habib Husein in a YouTube interview, speaking about the benefits of preaching through digital mediums. (Photo from Husein Ja'far Al Hadar/Instagram)

Trendy Indonesian Habib Rides the Waves Online

Ahmad Muhajir and Norshahril Saat

Podcasts and online videos constitute the modern currency for religious conversations in Indonesia today, and a young Indonesian preacher has been banking on these platforms effectively to reach out to the young. Merdeka.com, an online news portal in the country, has dubbed Habib Husein bin Ja'far al-Hadar "the *habib* for the millennials." The story of the 35-year-old may inspire other *habaib* to alter their preaching strategy.

The *habaib* (plural for *habib*) pride themselves as members of the Prophet Muhammad's household. They are generally traditional in outlook, dress, and mannerisms. But some among them, including Habib Hussein, are breaking ranks with their community to appeal to younger audiences, thwart conservatism online, and reclaim the discursive space for moderates.

Muslims regard the *habaib* as conveyors of the Prophet's "blue blood." The men carry the term "Syed" or "the honourable" in front of their names, while women use "Sharifah." The preachers among the *habaib* usually wear long garments, robes, and the *serban* (turban), demonstrating their Arabic identity and keeping with the Prophet's tradition. The *habaib* are generally non-political, preferring to congregate in their reading circles, reciting praises to the Divine and the Prophet, and discussing topics on spirituality and rituals. However, some notable *habaib* in Indonesia do not conform to this moderate and quietist image. One example is Habib Rizieq Shihab of the violent and conservative Islamic Defender's Front (FPI).

While remaining steadfast in keeping with the non-combative *habaib* tradition, Habib Hussein has repackaged his sermons through comedy and effective use of social media. He attenuates his persona as an Islamic scholar and broaches religious and non-religious topics, including pop culture, in his talks on YouTube.

Other notable Indonesian *habaib* such as Habib Rizieq Shihab from Jakarta and Habib Syech from Solo continue to don the traditional dressing, but Habib Husein prefers to show up in *baju koko* or *batik*, combined with a sarong, demonstrating Javanese identity.

Habib Husein's online push and appeal to the young happened by chance. He ventured into online spaces after feeling that Indonesian mosques did not give him enough space. He posits that it is instructive for contemporary preachers to populate YouTube with positive religious content. In an interview with podcaster and celebrity Helmi Yahya in August 2021, he added that the medium for *da'wah* (the preaching of Islam and exhortation to submit to Allah) in the past had been either "*khitobi* [oratory] or *kitabi* [through writing]. Now, there is a third, *YouTuby*, meaning using social media".

Habib Husein has garnered 1.08 million subscribers for his first YouTube channel, 'Jeda Nulis' (A Break from Writing), which he started in May 2018. He has created and co-created more than 600 videos across three YouTube channels, cumulatively attracting 134.5 million views.

But the significance of Habib Husein lies not only in his family lineage, active collaboration with celebrities, and online presence, but also in his moderate outlook. He is slow to pass judgement on non-practising Muslims, agnostic individuals, and people of other religions. Comparing *da'wah* to Google Maps, he contends that "[Google Maps] shows you one possible direction to your destination, but if you do not follow it, it will show you alternative routes."

Habib Husein also prefers dialogue, and he is never forceful in pushing his point of view. "We differ but can co-exist" is the underlying philosophy of his thinking. He would rather seek common ground than sharpen differences. Importantly, rather than keeping himself in the company of other *habaib*, Habib Husein readily shares the same stage with celebrities on and off camera. He is also known for entertaining quirky questions in jest.

Recently, Habib Husein and two stand-up comedians, Coki Pardede and Tretan Muslim, collaborated to develop a YouTube channel to discuss questions many other preachers might consider insensitive. The two stand-up comedians have an extensive fan base. The programme has wide outreach, with the final 24 latest episodes attracting more than 34 million views. Some questions raised during the programme did not irk him: In the Hereafter, could the people in heaven Whatsapp the people in hell? If someone is called *habib* because he has the Prophet's bloodline, would an ordinary person become *habib* after getting a blood transfusion from one? If the animals sacrificed during Eid Adha will be our rides to paradise, can we choose the fast runner like a cheetah, instead of cows and lambs?

Habib Husein feels that through comedy, he can make his points of view clearly to the young, and Muslim preachers should not be seen as attacking other religions. Interestingly, one of the comedians is a self-proclaimed agnostic who thinks that life would be wonderful if more people tuned in to listen to Habib Husein's views about differences.

Habib Husein is a sterling example of a young preacher willing to go beyond the confines of identity-conscious *habaib* traditions. In this day and age, the medium of religious propagation and the appeal of the preacher cannot be separated from the quality of content. In Indonesia, humour, the arts, and culture are part and parcel of social and community life. But moderate *habaib* must also venture out of their quietist cocoons to wrestle back Islam from the conservatives. Preachers should not limit themselves to the confines of organisational and institutional structures, and they should be prepared to go solo.

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Wan Nor: Hero from the Deep South but Not the Saviour of Thai Democracy

Daungyewa Utarasint

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Figures 1-2 (above and below): Wan Nor, the first Muslim to hold the high position of House Speaker in the Thai government. (Photos from Prachachat Party's Facebook page)

22 May 2023 was a symbolic day for Thai politics because it marked the ninth anniversary of the 2014 coup d'état.[1] In the hope of restoring democracy, eight political parties jointly signed a 23-point memorandum of understanding (MOU).[2] That same day, at the MOU's signing, Wan Muhammad Noor Matha (hereafter Wan Nor), the veteran Muslim politician of Yala province and leader of the Prachachart Party, gave a powerful speech.[3] He wished to see change in Thailand, begging the "powerful and mighty ones" to "use your power and your mighty strength to help those who want to work for their people...let them work for their people" (author's translation). His inspirational speech was powerful and went viral; Wan Nor's political star was burnished overnight.

On 4 July, Wan Nor gained more fame when he was appointed as the compromise choice for Thailand's House Speaker. People in the southernmost provinces of Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat celebrated this news with tremendous joy. The symbolism of a politician from Thailand's Muslim-majority "Deep South" being the Buddhist kingdom's peacemaker led to netizens flooding social media platforms with their selfies or pictures with Wan Nor. For some, Wan Nor can now claim to be the saviour and pride of Thailand's Malay-Muslims, but the key question now is, can he mend a divided parliament in Bangkok?

A former deputy prime minister (under then PM Thaksin Shinawatra), Wan Nor had previously served as House Speaker between 1996 and 2000, under then PM Chuan Leekpai. Wan Nor is the first Muslim to hold such high positions in Thai government. Hailed for his calm demeanour and deliberate conscientiousness, he is considered by his generation as one of the most respectable Thai politicians. However, Wan Nor can be considered a public figure who may inspire 'love' or 'hate' depending on one's religious or political affiliation. Many Malay-Muslims would view him as their most reputable representative. However, from the author's recent interviews with Buddhist elements in Yala, some Buddhist extremists have associated Wan Nor and Prachachart with the Muslim separatist movement. They have even pejoratively labelled Prachachart a "Party of Thugs."

While a deep dive into the longstanding conflict in Thailand's South is beyond the scope of this commentary, the conflict in part derives from the 2004 Narathiwat military camp rampage.[4] When the state authorities alleged that Wan Nor's team members were the masterminds behind the violence, Wan Nor took no action. Later that year, a clash between Malay-Muslims and the Thai state authorities at Kruesae Mosque and Takbai claimed nearly 120 Malay-Muslim lives.[5] Again, Wan Nor remained silent. In retaliation, the southernmost constituencies punished Wan Nor in the 2005 general election: he and all his team members failed to be re-elected.

After a time in the political wilderness, Wan Nor sprang back into politics in 2018 with the help of Police Colonel Tawee Sodsong, the former director of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre. Together they formed a new political party, Prachachart (which means "Ummah" or Muslim community in Thai). Speculation exists that Tawee and Wan Nor still have close ties with Thaksin Shinawatra, though both men have denied this. Whatever the case, the catastrophic incidents of Kruesae and Takbai during Thaksin's premiership caused Thaksin's party to lose its popularity in the deep south. Wan Nor's Prachachart is thus seen as a rebranded party. Now, people are curious whether Wan Nor will steer Prachachart closer towards Pheu Thai's lead or continue to protect the interests of Malay-Muslims.

The 2023 general election results showed that Prachachart still won most of their seats in the deep south. In 13 constituencies, they secured seven seats plus two from the party-list. Some argue that Prachachart's success was due to Wan Nor's close connection with Islamic religious leaders from both the reformist (*khana mai*) and the traditionalist (*khana kao*) camps. However, politicians from various camps who spoke to the author criticised Prachachart for stirring up identity politics to attack his opponents. Whatever was the case, the campaign successfully kept Prachachart's rival parties at arm's length.

Nonetheless, Wan Nor has not translated this stellar performance into success within the national legislative assembly. His position as House Speaker was put to the test on 19 July, when he was criticised for his inability to control the House during the second round of voting for Move Forward candidate Pita Limjaroenrat's nomination for prime minister.[6] The pro-military parties essentially argued, on a technicality, that Pita's renomination was a motion and that resubmitting a failed motion was against parliamentary regulation 41.[7] (Pita's supporters counter-argued that renominating Pita was not a general motion and hence would not be subject to that parliamentary regulation.) Wan Nor eventually allowed the vote on the logic that resubmitting the same name for the nomination was a motion – that is, subject to the regulation. Thus, those opposed to Pita's nomination won by a majority and defeated Pita's bid.

On 7 June, at Prince of Songkhla University in Pattani, students held a seminar on the right to self-determination and Patani peace.[8] They held a mock referendum on self-rule, leading Thai security authorities to accuse the organisers and panelists of promoting a separatist agenda. In response, Wan Nor said in an interview that Prachachart would never endorse such an activity.[9] Students interviewed by the author in mid-July expressed disappointment at Wan Nor's reaction. This incident illustrates how Wan Nor must now carefully navigate between his main constituency – Malay-Muslims in the south – and the heavy demands of his Speaker role. He needs to convince his southern support base that he is not trying to please Pheu Thai (and its partners) and Thai security officials at the expense of the former's long-term interests. Saving Thai democracy, however, might be a shot too long even for this veteran of Thai politics.

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Notes

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2. https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2576039/coalition-hopefuls-unveil-pact
3. https://www.khaosodenglish.com/news/2023/05/23/people-are-moved-by-a-pro-democracy-speech/
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The Meaning of Life and Values in Northeast Asia

Ilhong Ko

What is the meaning of life? What values are fundamental and shared across cultures? What perceptions of life values are unique to a given society? When Pew Research Center carried out a Global Attitudes Survey in 2021, the results of this survey became the subject of great media and public interest in South Korea. Of the 17 countries with advanced economies, it was only in South Korea that 'material abundance' ranked first. In most of the other countries, 'family' ranked first. The possible reasons for this became the topic of heated debate within South Korea's academic community. It was pointed out, in particular, that the design of the survey (in which people's subjective responses were later coded, rather than presenting multiple-choice questions) may have led to misrepresentation or distortion of respondents' subjective meanings in the data processing stage.

In an attempt to further explore the issue of how the meaning of life may be perceived differently according to country or region, researchers at Seoul National University Asia Center carried out another survey on values, entitled "Social Values Survey in Asian Cities." In this survey, the residents of 15 major cities (12 of which were located in Asia) were asked a series of questions relating to social values and their contribution to one's meaning of life.

This edition of *News from Northeast Asia* presents the results and insights obtained from the "Social Values Survey in Asian Cities." The overall design of the survey – along with the analytical methods used and some preliminary interpretations regarding what values are believed to be essential to the meaning of life in Asia's cities – are introduced by Dong-Kyun Im, of the Department of Sociology at Seoul National University, in "Social Values Survey in Asian Cities – Analysis of the Results on Values and the Meaning of Life." In "Meritocracy in Asia: Beliefs in Its Ideals and Reality, and Life Satisfaction," Yong Kyun Kim, of the Department of Political Science & International Relations at Seoul National University, examines how the ideal and reality of meritocracy, as well as the dissonance between the two, have an impact on life satisfaction for Asia's urban residents. Finally, Jungwon Huh, based at Seoul National University Asia Center, uses the survey results to shed light on how young adults residing in Seoul regard family and children in a way that is strikingly different from those residing in cities outside of Northeast Asia.

A vast amount of data was obtained from the 2022 "Social Values Survey in Asian Cities," and the three pieces comprising this edition represent the preliminary results of analysis undertaken on just a fraction of this data. Researchers affiliated with Seoul National University Asia Center aim to carry out further in-depth analysis on the survey data to provide new insights on the topic of values for Northeast Asia, and indeed all of Asia, in the future.

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SNUAC
Seoul National University Asia Center

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

Social Values Survey in Asian Cities: Analysis of the Results on Values and the Meaning of Life

Dong-Kyun Im

Seoul National University Asia Research Center, along with Korea Research, conducted a survey in 2022 on social values and the meaning of life. As part of this survey, participants were asked to rate the importance of 11 options relating to one's meaning of life. The results of the survey and the subsequent application of multiple correspondence analysis undertaken on the results provide some interesting implications of the perception of values amongst the city dwellers of Asia. Admittedly, comparisons between countries based on the survey data need to be approached with caution. For example, there may have been slight differences in the nuances of the survey form, which was translated into 12 different languages. In addition, because the survey was targeted only at the residents of major cities, the results cannot be seen to represent the opinions of each country as a whole. Nevertheless, there are interesting patterns that can be observed between the countries of Asia, which may be further explored in the future to obtain key insights into the similarities and differences in perceptions regarding 'value' in Asia.

The "Social Values Survey in Asian Cities" was carried out in 15 cities: Seoul, Tokyo, Beijing, Singapore, Taipei, Hanoi, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, New Delhi, Riyadh, Jerusalem, Ankara, London, Paris, and New York. The size of study subjects is 10,500, which consists of 700 adults per city. The participants of the survey were first asked to rate the importance of the following 11 options in terms of their contribution to one's meaning of life: (1) family, (2) occupation and career, (3) material well-being, (4) relationships with close acquaintances, (5) health, (6) freedom, (7) hobbies and recreation, (8) education or learning, (9) romantic relationships, (10) new experiences, and (11) faith. In addition, participants were also asked to select the three most important options among the 11 and rank them in terms of their significance.

Because the survey targeted 15 cities, it is not an easy task to visualize how each of the cities responded to each of the 11 items using tables or graphs. Therefore, in order to more effectively examine the differences between cities, multiple correspondence analysis was used. This is a methodological approach that can effectively visualize the number of people that selected a given option as the most important one in terms of meaning of life, allowing country-by-country comparisons. The results of the analysis are illustrated in Figure. 1.

The distance between two cities or two options in Figure 1 represents the degree of correspondence, which was measured by focusing on 'relative importance.' For example, in the case that Option A was selected by the greatest number of survey respondents of a given city as one of the three most important options regarding the meaning of life, if the proportion of respondents who chose A is *relatively* low compared to other cities but the *proportion* of respondents who chose B is *relatively* high (although the *absolute proportion* is low), then that city is displayed as being closer to B. More specifically, the way to interpret the graph is as follows. After connecting a line from two points on the graph to the origin,

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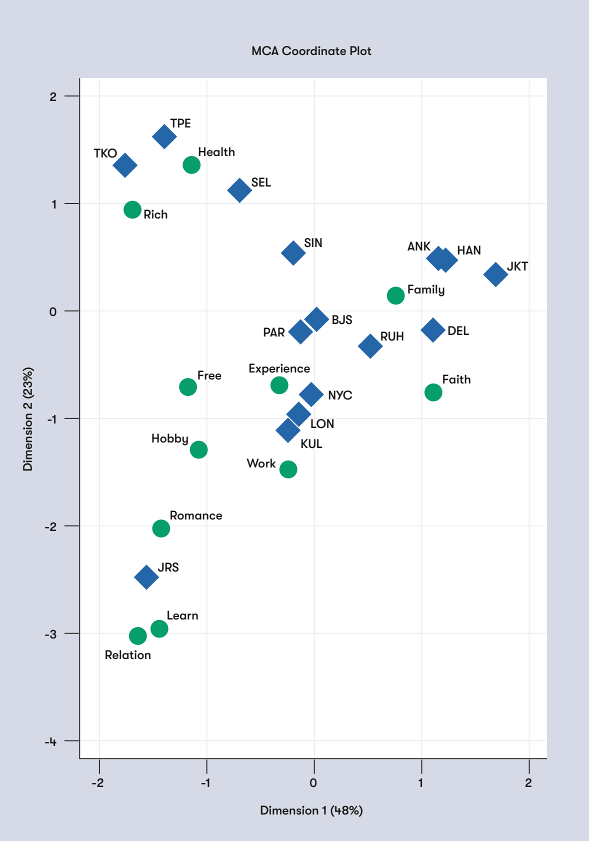

Fig. 1 (above): Results of the multiple correspondence analysis demonstrating the relationship between the 15 cities that participated in the survey (diamond) and the 11 options associated with the meaning of life (dot). The names of the cities are abbreviated as follows: Tokyo - TKO, Seoul - SEL, Singapore - SIN, Taipei - TPE, Beijing - BJS, Jakarta - JKT, Ankara - ANK, Hanoi - HAN, Riyadh - RUH, London - LON, New Delhi - DEL, New York - NYC, Paris - PAR, Jerusalem - JRS, Kuala Lumpur - KUL. (Figure courtesy of the author, 2023)

Continued from previous page

the smaller the angle between the two lines, the higher the probability of the two points being selected at the same time; a larger angle indicates a relatively lower probability of the two being selected together. For example, the ratio of "health" and "material well-being" (labeled as "Rich") being selected together with "Seoul" (labeled as "SEL") was found to be relatively high, but the correspondence with "faith" was relatively low. The fact that the angle between "Seoul" and "family" is close to 90° indicates that the correspondence was found to be of an average degree – that is, the mean with respect to all cities.

Overall, a similar pattern could be observed for the cities of Northeast Asia and Singapore, with the exclusion of Beijing. In the case of these cities, "health" and "material well-being" were regarded as being relatively more important, and "faith" less so. It could also be observed that respondents from Tokyo (22.3 percent) or Taipei (17.0 percent) were more likely to choose "material well-being" as an important component of the meaning of life, compared to Seoul (13.7 percent).

One of the key criticisms of South Korean society that emerged as a result of the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Survey was that Koreans were only interested in material wealth and placed little value on enhancing the well-being of one's inner self. A simple additional analysis was therefore conducted to see the extent to which such criticisms could be confirmed through this survey. The average of respondents' answers about the significance of three factors – (1) hobbies and recreation, (2) education or learning, and (3) new experiences – to their meaning of life was compared against the importance of material well-being. Variables were then constructed by calculating the difference, with higher values indicating that respondents had regarded material well-being to be more important than the other, non-material options. The average of these values by city is shown in Figure 2.

The graph presented in Figure 2 illustrates that, among the 15 cities, respondents from Tokyo and Seoul placed the highest relative importance on material well-being. Interestingly enough, in the case of Seoul, the absolute degree of importance placed on material well-being is indeed higher than in other cities, but it is not overwhelmingly high: Seoul was fourth out of 15 cities. However, since the degree to which hobbies and recreation, education or learning, and new experiences were seen to contribute to the meaning of life is relatively low for Seoul (12th out of 15 cities), the gap between the two types of values was greater than in most other cities. In other words, in the case of Seoul, the importance of material well-being appears to be relatively more prominent because the degree of meaning gained from the non-material sphere is seen to be relatively insignificant.

The analysis of the data from the "Social Values Survey in Asian Cities" is ongoing, and only some preliminary results were presented in this piece. Differences between countries are based on cultural differences, and so we must be careful about making any absolute value judgments. Nevertheless, the findings of the survey seem to suggest that the residents of Northeast Asian cities tend to regard material well-being and health as key elements of their meaning of life, and such residents place relatively less importance on the activities that may enrich their lives in . Perhaps this is because the latter are regarded as something that can or should only be achieved when the former is sufficient. This mindset and other implications obtained from the survey will require further investigation in the future.

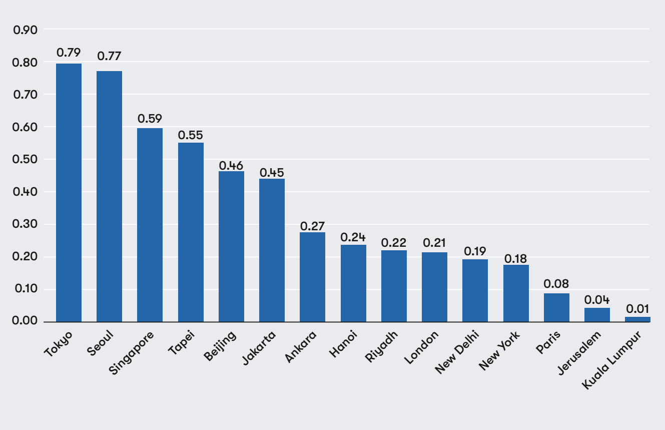

Fig. 2 (above): Values indicating the difference between the average of respondents' answers about the significance of three categories – (1) hobbies and recreation, (2) education or learning, and (3) new experiences – were to their meaning of life compared against the importance of material well-being, according to city. (Figure courtesy of the author, 2023)

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Meritocracy in Asia: Beliefs in Its Ideals and Reality, and Life Satisfaction

Yong Kyun Kim

How is belief in meritocracy related to satisfaction with life? If one sympathizes with the meritocratic principle that prizes should be distributed according to talents and efforts, but also believes that society does not adhere to this principle in practice, then how does this influence evaluations of one's current life? This piece explores this question using the results of the "Social Values Survey in Asian Cities."

Two keywords that have been the subject of heated debate in Korean society over the past decade are "fairness" and "meritocracy," a result of the younger generation speaking out against society's existing compensation structure. This trend is reflected in the responses to questions regarding meritocracy and life satisfaction in the "Social Values Survey in Asian Cities." The rate of fairness being mentioned as a value to be pursued was low in all societies, but ten percent of respondents from Seoul chose fairness as the most important value. On the other hand, five percent of respondents from Tokyo and less than three percent of respondents from other cities mentioned fairness as the most important value that society should pursue.

How, then, does the tendency to pursue fairness based on meritocracy relate to an individual's degree of satisfaction with life? The questions regarding meritocracy that were asked as part of the "Social Values Survey in Asian Cities" consisted of four questions about whether one agreed with the principles of meritocracy, and an additional four questions about whether one believed that her society operated according to those principles of meritocracy. The first four questions concern the ideals of meritocracy; the other four questions measure the respondents' belief in the reality of meritocracy. The survey questions were designed based on the hypothesis that the greater the difference between one's ideal of meritocracy and reality, the lower her life satisfaction would be. The analysis presented in this article focuses on the results of responses from a total of nine cities based in Asia, including four countries in Northeast Asia (Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and China), four countries in Southeast Asia (Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam), and one country in South Asia (India).

First, Figure 1 shows the distribution of the average ideal (Y-axis) and reality (X-axis) of meritocracy, as well as the average degree of life satisfaction by city (font size). The tendency to believe that meritocracy is desirable was highest in Hanoi, but it was surprisingly low in Seoul and Tokyo. The tendency to believe that society operates according to meritocracy was high in New Delhi and Hanoi, and it was low in Seoul and Tokyo. In particular, Seoul showed a much lower score than other cities in this regard. Life satisfaction by city was highest in the following order: New Delhi, Beijing, Jakarta, Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Taipei, Tokyo, and Seoul. What is interesting is that, excluding Beijing, there is a clear regional pattern in which life satisfaction is highest in South Asia, lowest in Northeast Asia, with Southeast Asia located in the center.

In order to see how the gap between the ideal and reality of meritocracy is related to life satisfaction, the gap between the ideal and reality was calculated in terms of the difference and ratio between the two, and life satisfaction in each city was also calculated. The life satisfaction levels were traced, and as expected, a clear tendency for life satisfaction to decrease as the gap between the ideal and reality increased was observed. Life satisfaction was highest in New Delhi, where the gap between the ideal and reality was the lowest. Meanwhile, life satisfaction was lowest in Seoul, where the gap was the largest. Here, too, regional patterns are evident. Excluding Beijing, the gap becomes bigger and life satisfaction becomes lower in the following order: South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia.

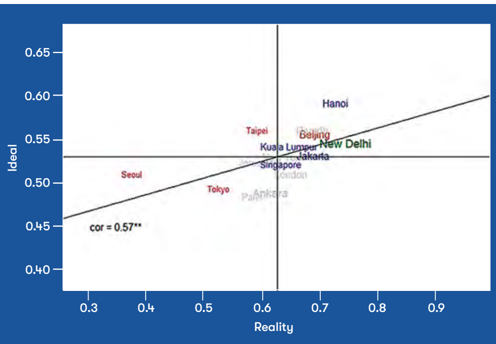

Fig. 1

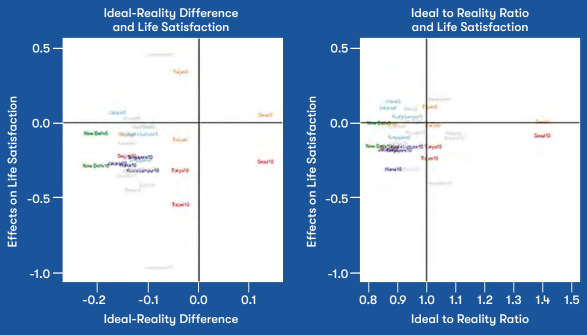

Fig. 2

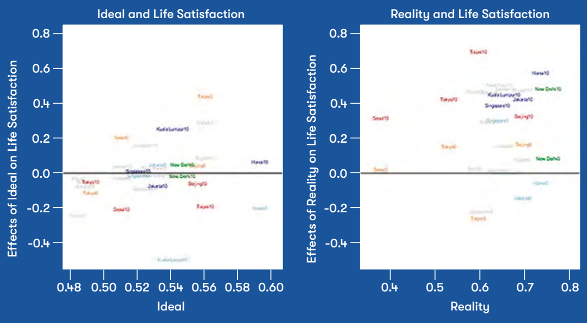

Fig. 3

Fig. 1 (top): City average values for ideals and reality of meritocracy and life satisfaction. (Figure courtesy of the author, 2023).

Fig. 2 (centre): Effects of the gap between the ideal and reality of meritocracy on life satisfaction (at the level of the individual). (Figure courtesy of the author, 2023).

Fig. 3 (below): Effects of the ideal and reality of meritocracy, respectively, on life satisfaction (at the level of the individual). (Figure courtesy of the author, 2023).

Perceptions of Children and Family: Comparisons between Seoul and the Other Cities of the "Social Values Survey in Asian Cities"

Jungwon Huh

The downward trend in South Korea's birth rate has become more severe, reaching a total fertility rate of 0.7, and natural population decline has already begun. Korean society is struggling to come up with countermeasures as the negative effects of population decline appear throughout society. Many experts have diagnosed various causes and suggested countermeasures for Korea's severely low birth rate, but human society does not exist in a vacuum and it is extremely difficult to clearly establish the causes of such social problems. In an attempt to explore this issue from a broader perspective, ten questions regarding perceptions of marriage, family, and children were included in the "Social Values Survey in Asian Cities." This article presents the results of analysis undertaken on the survey data, which can provide insights into how family values and the burden of support may impact birth rates.

Raising a child is a fulfilling yet arduous task. The responses to the survey questions regarding the negative aspects of childbearing and childrearing are striking in the way that Seoul sticks out. The percentage of respondents from Seoul between 18-30 years old who agreed that having children is a financial burden is 82 percent, which is overwhelmingly higher than that of the other Asian cities. Additionally, 79 percent thought that the freedom of parents would be restricted when children were born, and 80 percent thought that having children would limit the opportunities for one of the parents to continue with their career. In particular, the percentage of Seoul respondents who agreed that childbearing and childrearing resulted in financial burdens and career restrictions was 20-40 percent higher than that observed in the other cities of the survey. This indicates that the degree to which young adults in Seoul perceived the financial burden of children was much greater than that of the other cities in Asia.

Responses to questions regarding the positive aspects of having children and expectations of financial help from children in old age also showed a similar trend. Only 58 percent of young adults in Seoul agreed that "children are the greatest joy in life," which is the second lowest percentage after young people in Tokyo (53 percent); in comparison, 77-96 percent of young adults in other cities agreed with such a statement [Fig. 1]. The only cities where the percentage of young adult respondents agreeing to the financial burden of children was higher than the percentage of respondents agreeing that children were the greatest joy in life were Seoul (82 percent > 58 percent) and Tokyo (64 percent > 53 percent). Seoul was also the city where the lowest percentage (39 percent) of young adult respondents agreed that "adult children are a great help in old age."

Expectations for mutual support among family members was another topic of interest. Questions asked in relation to this were as follows: (1) "Adult children should support some or all of their elderly parents' living expenses," (2) "Parents should support their children's education to the extent of their financial ability," (3) "Parents should help their children raise grandchildren." Only 46 percent of young adults in Seoul agreed that adult children should cover the living expenses of their elderly parents, which was the lowest only after Tokyo (31 percent). Only 39 percent of young adults in Seoul agreed that their elderly parents should look after their grandchildren; in Taipei and Tokyo, the percentages were 20 percent and 25 percent, respectively. Additionally, only 44 percent of young adults in Seoul agreed with the statement that "parents should provide maximum support for their children's education," which was the lowest among the surveyed cities.

The perceptions of young adults in Seoul that were revealed through the survey are rather shocking. Even if we acknowledge the possibility of there being systematic cultural differences in response patterns in the case of such worldwide surveys, it cannot be denied that the perception of young adults in Seoul regarding childbearing and childrearing is extremely negative compared to those in Asia's other cities. Therefore, this result of the "Social Values Survey in Asian Cities" indicates the need for further qualitative analysis to be undertaken on the possible contexts that may have resulted in the negative perceptions of children and family for Seoul's young adults, and to compare those contexts against those of Asia's other cities.

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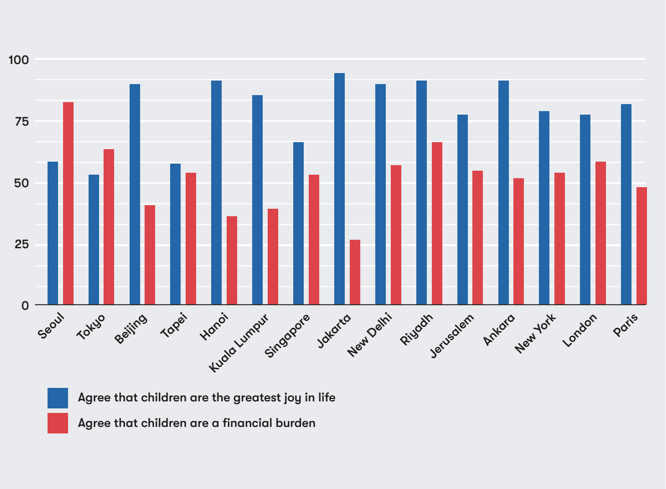

Fig. 1 (above): Percentage of young adults who agreed to the statement that children were (1) the greatest joy in life and (2) a financial burden, according to city. (Figure courtesy of the author, 2023)

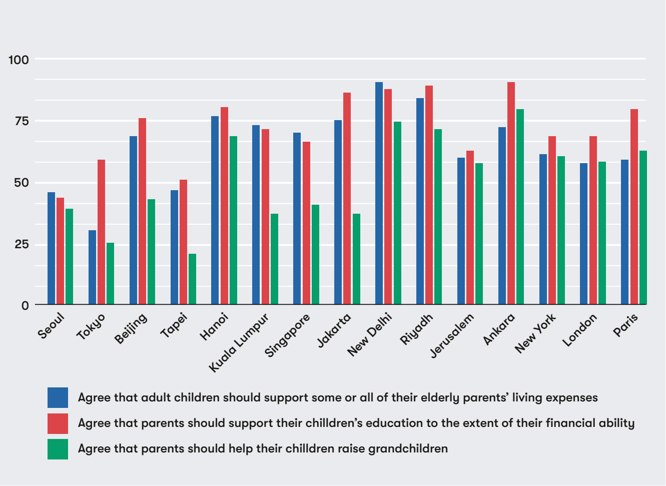

Fig. 2 (above): Percentage of young adults who agreed to the following statements: (1) adult children should support some or all of their elderly parents' living expenses, (2) parents should support their children's education to the extent of their financial ability, and (3) parents should help their children raise grandchildren according to city. (Figure courtesy of the author, 2023)

Individual-level multiple regression analysis was also conducted for each city. In this case, analysis was conducted based on the assumption that the impact of holding meritocratic ideals on life satisfaction would vary, depending on which social class an individual belonged to. Figure 2 shows the size of the impact of the gap between the ideal and reality on life satisfaction by city. The number zero associated with each city name represents the lowest social class, and ten represents the highest social class. If the city is located above the zero horizon, it means that the larger the gap between the ideal and reality, the higher the satisfaction with life. Conversely, if it is located below zero, it means that the larger the gap, the lower the satisfaction. A few things stand out. First of all, regardless of social class, most groups are distributed below the horizontal line. This means that, in general, the larger the gap, the lower one's life satisfaction. Second, in most cities, it was found that the higher the social class, the more pronounced the negative effects of the gap. Thinking highly of the ideal of meritocracy, but facing a reality in which its practice is lacking, seems to have the effect of lowering life satisfaction among society's upper classes. Third, this trend was particularly evident in Jerusalem and Taipei. Fourth, in Jerusalem, Taipei, Jakarta, and Seoul, it was found that the lower the social class, a greater gap between the ideal and reality of meritocracy corresponded with higher life satisfaction.

It was confirmed that when the ideal of meritocracy is high but reality does not follow, life satisfaction is low, especially for people belonging to a high social class. In order to examine the effects of social class in terms of ideal and reality, the two were examined separately by applying individual-level multiple regression analysis. The left side of Figure 3 shows the impact of the ideal of meritocracy and the right side the impact of meritocracy's reality on life satisfaction. Similarly, the number zero refers to the lowest social class and ten refers to the highest social class. In terms of the ideal of meritocracy, the values generally cluster around the horizontal line, indicating that the ideal itself does not have a significant impact on life satisfaction. However, if one belongs to the lowest social class and has a high ideal of meritocracy – especially in places like Taipei, Riyadh, and Seoul – a tendency to have higher life satisfaction is partially observed. On the other hand, the values for the reality of meritocracy are mostly located above the horizontal line, indicating that they generally have a positive effect on life satisfaction. The impact of the reality of meritocracy was clearly positive in cities particularly when social class was almost always high. This is probably because people belonging to high social classes have high life satisfaction and tend to believe that meritocracy is well realized in their society.

Taipei showed the most interesting results in the individual-level analysis examined above. Here, the effects of the ideal and reality of meritocracy on life satisfaction had opposite effects depending on social class. When social class is the lowest, a high ideal has the effect of increasing life satisfaction, but this effect gradually decreases as social class increases. On the other hand, believing that meritocracy is implemented in reality was negative for life satisfaction when the social class was low, but gradually changed in a positive direction as one's social class went up. This pattern was similarly observed in Seoul.

To conclude, belief in meritocracy, especially a situation in which there is a high ideal of meritocracy but reality does not follow, was found to have a negative relationship with life satisfaction. And this relationship was more pronounced for people of a high social class. When the ideal is too high or the reality was believed to be too low, people, especially those belonging to high social classes, showed low levels of life satisfaction. The best examples of this were the respondents from Taipei and Seoul. In these two cities, more than anywhere else, the higher the ideal, the lower the life satisfaction of people from higher social classes. Interestingly, these two cities, along with Tokyo, are the cities where the gap between the ideal and reality of meritocracy was found to be the widest and where people's life satisfaction was found to be the lowest.

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Road Horizons in the Himalayas

Stéphane Gros

A dense network of ancient mountain paths and modern roads connects the communities living in the Himalayas. Recent infrastructure building, carrying different life opportunities, has altered and expanded people's social worlds while opening new horizons. The road epitomises the state's governmentality and vision of progress. It sometimes symbolises hope and developmental desire, and large public infrastructure projects often reshape circulatory regimes. For local communities, paths and roads manifest various forms of collective legacies, investment, and expectations which can be political, material, and spiritual.

The constraints and limitations imposed by topography, climate, and ecology are characteristic of the Himalayan experience. The history of human settlements in this mountainous region is intimately tied to various forms of mobility: river valleys constituted natural pathways for the flow of life, and mountain passes supplied the air that breathed life into society. In the Himalayas, people connected through trade, migrations, or pilgrimage and established long-standing economic, religious, and political relations across cultural differences between pastoral nomads or swidden cultivators of the highlands and agricultural communities of the lowland valleys and plains.[1]

Along Asia's highest mountain ranges, from the Pamirs in Central Asia to the great bend of the Hengduan edging the east of the Tibetan plateau, people, goods, skills, and ideas circulated regionally and beyond. Trails and now roads are the connective tissue between communities. This connective tissue is increasingly stretched by changing economic and political conditions that affect how people relate to their environment, move through (un)known landscapes, and maintain a sense of belonging. Today, social and spatial mobilities are increasingly the result of inequalities that they themselves help to (re)produce. However, through their mobile activities, people continue to immerse themselves in particular landscapes and generate their own visions of the future.

Pathways

Many historical variables and uneven temporalities have shaped the complex sociopolitical spatialities of Himalayan communities. This range of hills and high-elevation mountains exemplifies contrasted experiences of mobility and isolation, and the physical landscape greatly determines the routes along which connections can be established. This connectedness – an essential dimension of the Himalayan experience – takes shape, as anthropologist Martin Saxer has argued, along "pathways." More than connecting lines between locations, pathways constitute "bundles of exchange" that tie together particular places in relation to circulation patterns.[2]

In this Focus, a similar inspiration leads us to ask: how can circulations at different scales reveal the ways people inhabit spaces? How do Himalayan dwellers do so according to particular social, economic, or spiritual horizons? We bring together several participants from the "Himalayan Journeys" conference held in Paris in June 2022[3] to highlight how the social life of roads and infrastructure in the Himalayas, from the Karakoram to eastern Tibet, can be fruitfully studied through the lens of the relations people weave between them and with the broader non-human environment. Many avenues for reflection were sketched out on this occasion and our aim here is to provide but a glimpse of particular pathways of sociality that emerge along the trails or roads that traverse the Himalayas.

Infrastructures

Since the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) came into being, the issue of roads and connectivity in the Himalayas and beyond (Highland Asia, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia) has galvanised the fast-growing scholarship on infrastructure.[4] In this Focus, we are interested in infrastructures broadly speaking, whether physical or immaterial, large or nearly invisible, as sites of human encounter and sharing. We look at what they embody, enable, or promise, and how the environment and non-human worlds are entwined in these social processes.

Our purpose here is not to engage with the lively and productive "infrastructural turn" but to pursue a relational and processual approach that investigates how one particular type of infrastructure, the road – that is, an open way that allows for the movement of animals, people, and vehicles – co-constructs the social landscape or the environment at a broader level. In other words, we are interested in what roads can tell us as "stretched-out spaces of social relations."[5]

As many authors have shown, roads and infrastructures more generally tell us about states' efforts to assert their sovereignty as part of regimes of territorialisation.[6] Here, we write about infrastructure insofar as it reveals the importance of power and social relations without leaving out the non-human and the environment as realms of active engagement. We do not focus on roads in and for themselves, but on what they reveal or generate, on how different kinds of roads affect people differently. Specifically, focusing on the ongoing life of roads and pathways, their accessibility, construction, and maintenance, highlights their temporality, the shifting boundaries between the tangible and the intangible, and the transformative role of hope and futurity.

Roadwork

Building roads has more than ever become a government motto synonymous with connection, development, and wealth, symbolising the current neo-liberal ideology of mobility as a sign of adaptability, autonomy, and agency. There is a common belief that roadless territories cannot embrace globalisation and that tarmac is the visible sign that elected governments take care of local communities who will benefit from new connections with the outer world.

The transformative power of roads is often overestimated. However, when roads are considered as processes, they transform landscapes, create unexpected disruptions in the geomorphology of the mountains, and produce well-documented social effects, whether positive or negative, on people and places.

New routes have either replaced historical pathways crossing the Himalayas or created new corridors and have become significant agents of change. The contrast between the mountain path and the asphalted road places them not so much in opposition as on a spectrum of varied instantiation of the visions of the future.[7] To what extent are roads profitable, and for whom?

Besides the geopolitics of road-making as such, what comes across as lacking in the literature is scrutiny of locally lived realities of what is (dis)connected, and how. Several contributions to this Focus explore the complex interweaving of relations between state strategies and rationalities of road building and local practices. The ethnography of local development projects exposes state visions and ideologies that may run counter to local imaginations of

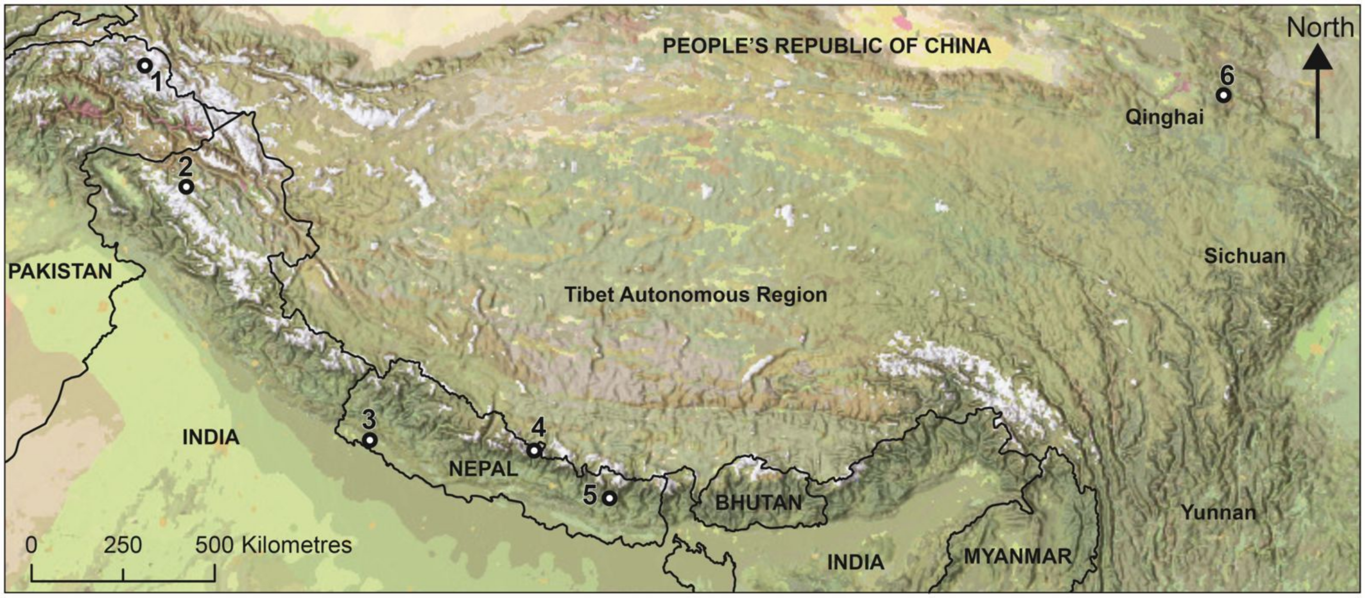

Fig. 1: General map of the area showing the localisation of the case studies in this Focus (Map design by Jérôme Picard).

○ Place of study

1 : Thibault Fontanari
2 : Callum Pearce
3 : Amy Johnson
4 : Nadine Plachta
5 : Florent Grazide
6 : John Smith

— International boundary
The boundaries drawn on this map are approximate and have no legal value

Sources : Esri, USGS

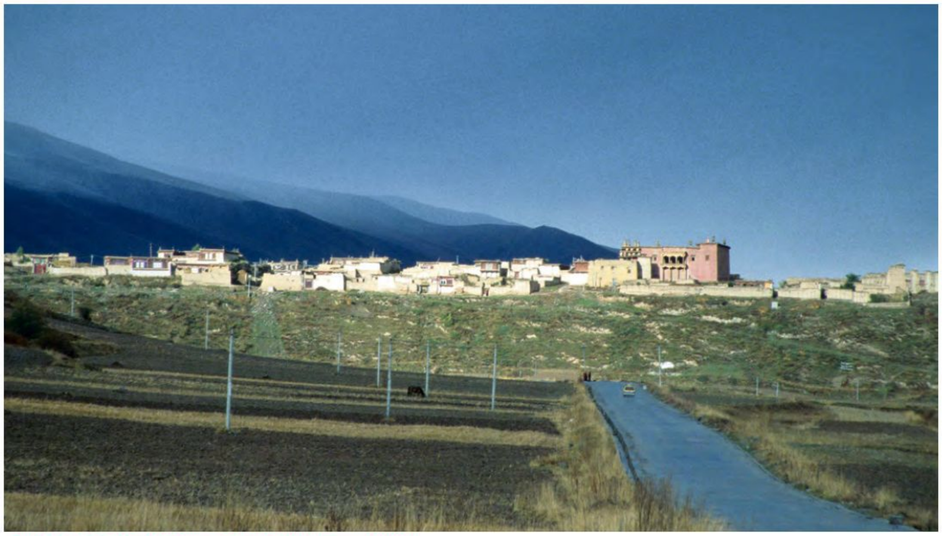

Fig. 2: Road in Eastern Tibet Khams region. (Photo by the author, 2004)

connectivity.[8] The articulation of several scales of analysis enabling one to grasp the dialectics of influences and power embodied in the road as a much sought-after infrastructure – sometimes imposed but rarely neutral regarding local power dynamics – deserves further research.

The papers

In this edition of The Focus, our authors build on the basic idea that a qualitative approach brings to light how the various stakes around the movement of people, goods, and skills, as well as the facilitation of this movement, are embedded in geopolitical orders, value regimes, and cultural or ontological frames of reference. They take us along diverse pathways and encounters imbued with fears and hopes.

We generally see infrastructures as what enables the flow and movement of matter in various forms: think of the house and the multiple ways it is connected through lines, wires, and pipes, or nowadays wirelessly to the outside. Under the visible surface, many invisible pathways contribute to the movement of things, people, and other-than-human beings, multilayered webs of connections and circulations. The road can take various meanings – not just metaphorical – and also be a channel for circulating energies and surprising travellers.

This Focus opens with an article by Callum Pearce, who discusses how in Buddhist areas of Ladakh, Himalayan India, spirits or "ghosts" travel along their own invisible roads that correspond to those used by humans by day. For this reason, Ladakhi are concerned with managing other beings' movement and attest to the potential threat to which ordinary paths and roads are open. This management manifests the potential dangers – real and imagined – to which roads open. Precisely because these lines of travel are openings onto an outside of the safe enclosure of the community, they are sites of vulnerability and risk. They are also, at the same time, the materialisation of social commitments.

In its modern version of the asphalted motorway, the road carries with it all the knowledge and vision of a specific scientific and technological approach to the environment. However, not all built structures rely on similar knowledge and political economy. Here, Thibault Fontanari alerts us to yet another aspect of the invisible dynamics that contribute to the materialisation of built forms and roads in particular: that of the gift and the solidarity it generates. In the Shimshal Valley of Pakistan, we see how infrastructures not only play on the distance and time between things and humans, but more importantly, become the very sites of a collective becoming with profound social and spiritual dimensions.

Circulation pathways can also carry people across time, space, and embodied differences of culture and language. As such, they enable the emergence of new values, of crossings that nurture a longing to become otherwise. What new circuits of belonging can roads facilitate? The next articles switch the narrative to local power structures to illustrate how mobility issues are thoroughly entangled with tensions around divergent visions for the future.

Amy Johnson highlights how sensitive questions around social and spatial origins permeate national and sub-regional politics in the borderlands of Nepal's Far Western Tarai. She brings an intimate look to this issue by revealing how larger social, political, and gendered dynamics unavoidably shape women's everyday movements and activities. In the lowlands of Tarai, Indigenous Tharu and resettled Hill-origin persons navigate social differences and diverse legacies of migration. In the context of Nepal's new federal constitution, passed in 2015, the provinces gained substantial new powers, extending national politics into gendered fields of labour and belonging.

The next two articles also reference the particular context of post-conflict Nepal and the changes that unfolded after the Maoist revolution leading to the elections of 2022. Nadine Plachta shows how, in the Tsum Valley (Manaslu Conservation Area) in Nepal, Indigenous imaginaries and government narratives diverge around the stakes of a new road. But it is not so much a story of clashing visions of infrastructural futures as, rather, that of the emergence, under changing conditions, of a discourse that values and advocates for Indigenous knowledge systems and alternative relations to land and the environment.

As Plachta points out, when countrywide local-level elections were held in 2022 in the Manaslu Conservation Area, people voted for a predominantly Indigenous-led local government. This presents an important step in strengthening self-determined development planning and designing more sustainable and sovereign futures for Indigenous Peoples in Nepal. This echoes Florent Grazide's description of the evolution of local politics in a small village in the Solukhumbu district. There, the predominantly Tamang population supported one of their own in the local elections so that their voice could be better heard. Again, the promises and failures of a major road project crystallised tensions around questions of belonging, the local interplay of ethnicity or group affiliation, or at another scale, the meaning and prospects of one's inclusion in the nation-state. However, in this case, what comes to the fore is how local politics is not necessarily shaped by larger issues around Indigenous rights but remains embedded in local power dynamics between kinship networks, ethnic groupings, and party affiliations.

How the state's project translates into people's daily lives and materialises (or not) through specific infrastructural projects varies across contexts. The keywords of Chinese development discourse are similar to those of global development and its associated notion of progress, which we also see at play in Nepal. However, they differ in practice, given the nature of state interventionism: China's massive infrastructure projects are embedded in large-scale, top-down social engineering programmes. Of particular relevance regarding our interest in evolving pathways and the impact of roads is how the state has implemented forced sedentarisation of Tibetan pastoralists and shaped new mobility patterns. As John Smith (a pseudonym) shows in his study conducted among a Tibetan community in the region of Amdo, their horizon has shrunk from the openness of the grassland to that of the linear concrete line, taking them to the city where their life is increasingly anchored. Their sedentarised life entails driving on the newly built road. Paradoxically, its use is made difficult because of the requirement of a government-issued driver's license, a hard-to-obtain new necessity of life. Here, the rugged terrain no longer constrains mobility, paperwork does.

The footpath and the motorable road inhabit peculiar temporal space: that of walking as a kind of engagement along a mountain path or that of driving on the smooth surface of a road, which likely took decades and may yet remain unfinished – going nowhere. Overall, the contributors to this Focus on "Road Horizons" provide rich ethnographic texture to engage with the questions of the local social imaginaries and practices around movement along particular pathways and the impact new roads can have on the worlds they reshape. They not only highlight the many heterogeneous networks (family, community, market, labour, expertise, etc.) that operate at differing levels beyond the built form of the road. They also emphasise that pathways are always in the making and forever evolving with the broader political, economic, and spiritual forces that shape their destiny.

Fig. 3: The gorge of the upper Salween at the border between Yunnan and Tibet. (Photo by the author, October 2010)

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Notes

[1] Tristan Bruslé contributed significantly to the shaping of the ideas sketched out in this introduction, and I thank him for all the stimulating exchanges that took place before, during, and after the organisation of the "Himalayan Journeys" conference, of which this Focus is an outcome (see note 3).

[2] Martin Saxer, "Pathways: A Concept, Field Site and Methodological Approach to Study Remoteness and Connectivity," *HIMALAYA* 36, no. 2 (2016): 104–19, https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol36/iss2/15. See also Martin Saxer, *Places in Knots: Remoteness and Connectivity in the Himalayas and Beyond* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2022).

[3] This international conference was convened by Tristan Bruslé and Stéphane Gros on behalf of the Centre for Himalayan Studies at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). Since January 2023, this centre has merged with another research team to create the Centre for South Asian and Himalayan Studies (CESAH).

[4] For a recent synthesis, see Alessandro Rippa, Galen Murton, and Matthäus Rest, "Building Highland Asia in the Twenty-First Century," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 83–111.

[5] Fiona Wilson, "Towards a Political Economy of Roads: Experiences from Peru," *Development and Change* 35, no. 3 (2004): 525–46.

[6] For Nepal, see Katherine Rankin, Tulasi S. Sigdel, Lagan Rai, Shyam Kumar, and Pushpa Hamal, "Political Economies and Political Rationalities of Road Building in Nepal," *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 22, no. 1 (June 2017): 43–84. See also Vibha Arora and Raile Rocky Ziipao, "The Roads (Not) Taken: The Materiality, Poetics and Politics of Infrastructure in Manipur, India," *Journal of South Asian Development* 15, no. 1 (2020): 34–61.

[7] Pace Akhil Gupta, "The Future of Ruins: Thoughts on the Temporality of Infrastructure," in The *Promise of Infrastructure*, eds. Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta, and Hannah Appel, 62–79 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 63.

[8] See for instance Ben Campbell, "Rhetorical Routes for Development: A Road Project in Nepal," *Contemporary South Asia* 18, no. 3 (2010): 267–79.

Ghost Roads in Ladakh

Callum Pearce

In Buddhist areas of Ladakh, Himalayan India, red-skinned beings called *tsan* wander through villages at night causing illness. These spirits or "ghosts" travel along their own invisible roads that correspond to those used by humans by day, passing through villages and by houses. Almost every Buddhist house in Ladakh is distinguished by red ochre marks or stones: waymarkers for the *tsan* that show a Ladakhi concern with managing the movement of other beings and that attest to the potential threat to which ordinary paths and roads are open.

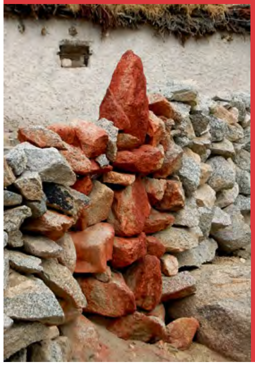

Fig. 1 (left): *Tsan* stone outside a house in Sakti, upper Ladakh. (Photo by the author, October 2013)

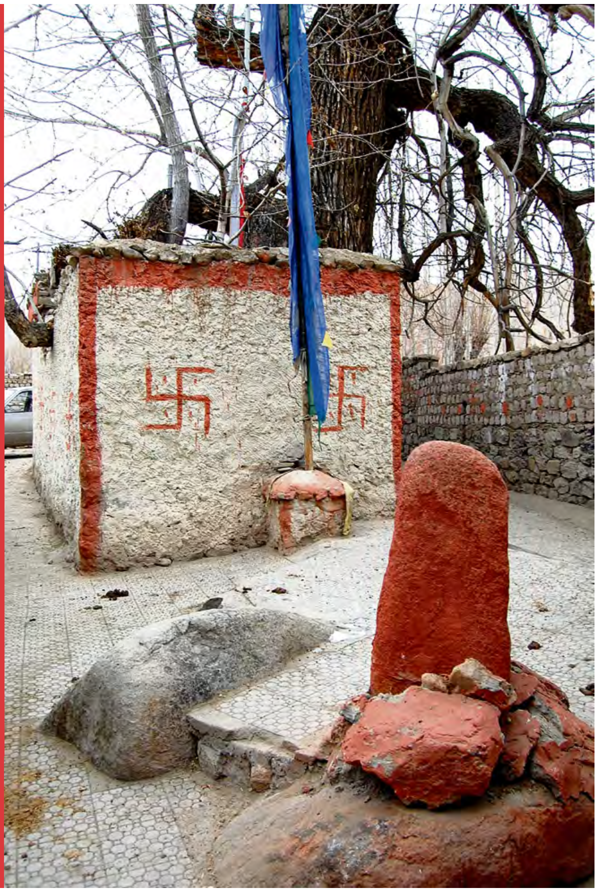

Fig. 2 (right): Red ochre marks and a large *tsan* stone in Sankar, Leh, Ladakh. (Photo by the author, February 2014)

Waymarkers of the *tsan*

Buddhist houses in Ladakh almost always display red ochre marks on the walls or a red-painted stone near the front door [Fig. 1]. With a surprising degree of consistency, everyone I spoke to across the region – men and women, adults and teenagers, laity and monks, from the town of Leh to the Zangskar valley – described them as signposts or waymarkers, directing the movement of red-skinned beings called *tsan* or *tsen* (Tibetan བཙན, *btsan;* pronunciation varies by region) that wander through villages at night. *Tsan* are a kind of *lhande* (Tibetan ལྷ་འདྲེ, *lha 'dre*, loosely "gods and/or demons"), spirits or "ghosts" in Indian English, who travel along their own invisible roads causing illness by their presence. The routes taken by these roads seem to correspond to those used by humans by day: passing through villages, by houses, connecting places of settlement and opening up lines of passage for threats from outside.

These markers appear in different forms and under different names across Ladakh. The red-painted stones are variously referred to *tsando* (Tibetan བཙན་རྡོ, *btsan rdo*, "*tsan* stone"), *tsandos* (Tibetan བཙན་མདོས, *btsan mdos*, loosely, "ritual vessel for *tsan*"), or *tsankhang* (Tibetan བཙན་ཁང, *btsan khang*, "*tsan* house"), and are sometimes conflated with *tsanchos zhangches*, the act of setting up such a stone (Tibetan བཙན་ཆོས་བཞང་ཅེས, *btsan chos bzhang ces*, loosely, "to undertake a *tsan* ritual"). These are almost always pointed stones painted with a red ochre called *tsak* (Tibetan བཙག, *btsag*), though variations on this pattern exist: in central Zangskar people use a naturally red-tinted quartz instead, while in some areas of Sham, the lower Leh valley, they are replaced by red-painted bricks arranged in the triangular shape of an incense platform. These objects are often accompanied by *tsak* markings on the outer walls of houses: red triangles painted on the corners, lines of dots leading around the house, sometimes auspicious symbols like swastikas and faces [Fig. 2]. In the Sham village of Hemis Shukpachan, one house bears images of a sword and a rifle painted in *tsak* – emblems of the warlike *tsan* [Fig. 3].[1] Most of these markings and stones are so rough and unobtrusive that an unfamiliar observer might miss them entirely.

Tsan

Tsan are a well-known category of spirit in Ladakh, playing a relatively prominent role in Tibetan Buddhist ritual imagery. Two of the best-known oracular deities of the region are identified as *tsan:* known as the red and white Rongtsan, they annually possess a pair of monks during a festival at the monastery of Matho and deliver prophecies on behalf of the former kingdom of Ladakh.[2] Several widely-known Tibetan Buddhist protector deities are closely associated with *tsan* – notably the *dharmapāla* Tsiu Marpo who, like the Rongtsan, annually possesses a monk during masked dances at the small Nyingmapa monastery of Takthok in Ladakh. These deities are typically depicted in art, ritual, and textual descriptions as appearing in the form of *tsan:* as red-skinned warriors mounted on red horses, clad in lamellar armour and brandishing weapons [Fig. 4]. The popular image of the spirits in Ladakh usually follows this pattern, but with one major difference: in Ladakh, and apparently in no other Tibetan-speaking areas, *tsan* are almost uniformly described as being "backless" creatures. From the front a *tsan* may appear *demo* (Tibetan བདེ་མོ, *bde mo*), "beautiful," but from behind there is only a gaping hole where the back ought to be – organs and bones visibly jutting out.

Tsan are often treated as semi-ridiculous entities. Stories I heard about personal encounters with them, or with inexplicable things later identified as *tsan*, often seemed to employ topsy-turvy imagery: outsized red animals met on the road at night, multiple strangers in red clothing riding a single donkey, or glowing shapes glimpsed in the distance. The Ladakhi laity I spoke to differed hugely in their attitudes towards them, as with ghosts and spirits in general. While I knew one former Buddhist monk who treated them as unquestionably real, most people I spoke to seemed doubtful of their existence at best – even asking me, on occasion, whether tsan were real.[3] The ubiquity of *tsando* and *tsak* markings does not necessarily conflict with this, but they have other purposes: the use of red markings on walls is also a way of visibly distinguishing Buddhist houses from those of Muslims, in a region where communal tensions between the two groups have become more and more fraught since the 1980s.

In keeping with their depiction as mounted warriors, tsan are commonly described as galloping through the villages of Ladakh by night. Where they linger, households suffer from illness and misfortune (Tibetan བཙན་གྱི་གནོད་པ, *btsan gyi gnod pa*, loosely "harm caused by *tsan*"): people experience bad dreams or inexplicable anxiety, ailments like fevers and paralysis, but also sudden accidents or the death of livestock. Outside of Buddhist ritual imagery and the public performance of spirit possession, it is in these experiences of misfortune that *tsan* are most likely to be encountered – usually after being identified as the root cause of problems by a ritual specialist, whether an *onpo* (Tibetan དབོན་པོ, *dbon po*, a diviner and exorcist) or a lay spirit medium. The process of treatment typically involves identifying *where* the *tsan* passed by the house, for tsan are understood to travel through Ladakh along their own, invisible roads: the *tsanlam* (Tibetan བཙན་ལམ, *btsan lam*, "*tsan* paths/roads"). Only a specialist can identify where these invisible ghost roads lie; having done so, and having located the specific *tsanlam* running by the house afflicted by illness, they can direct their patients to set up stones and markings to avert the *tsan* in future. A line of red dots painted on the walls directs the *tsan* to pass around the house away from the front door; a red stone, swastika, or painted sword acts as a waymarker that leads the *tsan* to continue along their roads.[4] In effect, these stones and markings make the invisible *tsanlam* visible: materialising the nocturnal movement of spirits, as an attempt to control or redirect their passage through areas of settlement.

Lines of movement

What is significant about this is that it shows Ladakhis responding to threats not merely by trying to drive off or shut out harmful forces – as, say, with ritual exorcisms that cast spirits out from the area of the village, or apotropaic devices that seal up the doors of the house – but rather by trying to direct and manage their movement. Keeping the house safe involves more than ritual boundary-maintenance: it requires careful attention to be paid to the movement of spirits and other creatures around and through the village. *Tsan* are diverted around houses like water in a stream, as a force that can be channelled and redirected but not cut off.

In this, the process follows a pattern often seen in Tibetan medical systems, as with the use of *lungta* (Tibetan རླུང་རྟ, *rlung rta*) flags: the brightly coloured "prayer flags" used to harness and direct the flow of "wind" (Tibetan རླུང, *rlung*), the element or humour involved in "wind disorders." This wind passes between the body and the outside world, and treatment of the forms of illness associated with it involves acting on the external element to bring about balance in the body.[5] As with the actions used to divert *tsan*, the process works not by shutting out external influences but by managing the flows of forces in the surrounding world.

Tsanlam appear to pass through every part of Ladakh inhabited by Buddhists, to the extent that their routes seem to correspond almost totally to the ordinary roads and paths used by people during the day: the roads that pass through villages and by houses, and the paths formed by repeated human movement. The idea that *tsanlam* could exist in areas that are *not* frequented by people is treated as ridiculous. When I suggested this to a group of students in a village outside the town of Leh, they laughed: why would there be *tsan* roads in the middle of a patch of desert, nowhere near human settlement?

In the use of *tsan* stones and *tsak* markings, we see a particular way of conceptualising the space of the village: as defined by flows of movement, of human

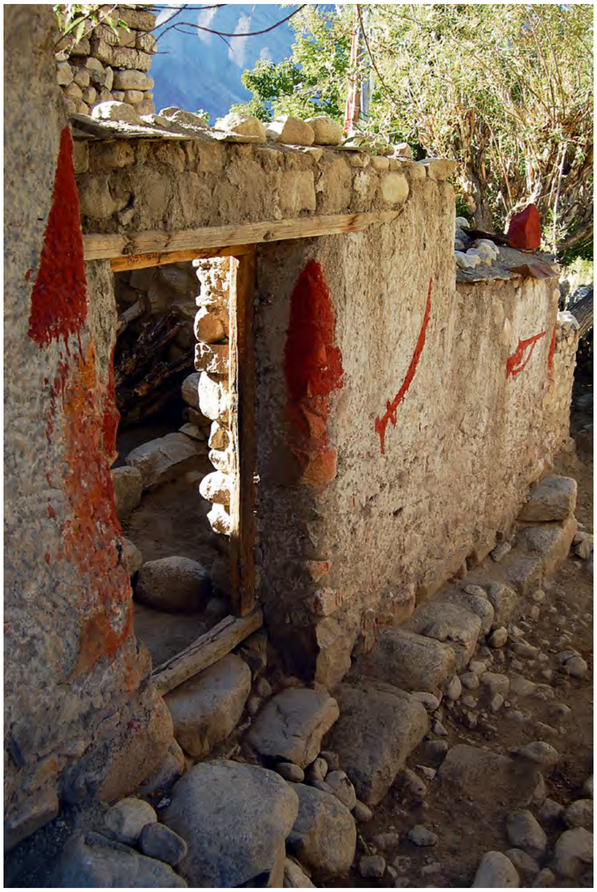

Fig. 3 (above): Red ochre markings including a sword and a rifle outside a house in Hemis Shukpachan, lower Ladakh. (Photo by the author, September 2013)

and non-human beings, who pass between the area of habitation and the world outside. The movement of *tsan* mimics the processes that sustain Ladakhi villages, the constant flows of movement of people and animals and substances: of water literally flowing down from mountain glaciers; of farmers going out to work in the fields; of grazing animals kept in pens by night, taken out to pasture by day; of people travelling to the towns of Leh or Kargil for paid employment; and, increasingly, of those leaving Ladakh entirely to find work elsewhere, returning periodically (if at all) to bring back money. Villages are composed of these flows and could not exist without them, but movement brings its own dangers: of harmful forces that enter from outside, and of depopulation as people leave for good.

In his book *Lines: A Brief History*, the anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that "life is lived [...] along paths, not in places," and that it is through the entanglement of lines of movement that a sense of place emerges. This leads to the image of the landscape as a "meshwork" composed from the "trails *along* which life is lived," the paths, stories and lines of movement of human and non-human beings that sustain and create a place.[6] This image is intended as an alternative to conceptions of places, organisms, and social units as bounded entities sealed off and separate from one another, and to static conceptions of human dwelling.

The concept of the meshwork may seem a good fit for the way Ladakhi villages are constituted by paths and movement, but this image does not quite capture the profoundly *negative* character of *tsanlam:* the appearance of these ghost roads is enabled by the cessation or contraction of human movement at night – when, as visibility reduces, people cede the space of the village to other beings – while the movement that they represent is basically antithetical to the normal operation of human life. These lines are an uncertain, unwanted, and normally invisible contribution to the meshwork of the Ladakhi landscape: associated with the passage of ridiculous and half-real beings, for most people they exist only in an implied form. They are made meaningful only in the experience of disorder, as the paths by which misfortune enters the village.

Strangers in the night

Crucially, the movement of *tsan* is confined to the night, when human movement is typically reduced to almost nothing. While Ladakhis tend to draw a clear distinction between the area of human habitation (Tibetan ཡུལ, *yul*, loosely "village" or "land") and the uninhabited regions beyond (Tibetan རི, *ri*, literally "mountain" or "hill" but with broader spatial connotations), the ill-defined boundary between these two areas shifts on a daily and seasonal basis. By day, and especially in summer, the village can seem to expand to encompass its surrounding fields. At night and in winter, as people retreat indoors and spend less time moving around outside, the mountains and their inhabitants encroach on the area of habitation. In Zangskar, in autumn, bears occasionally enter villages by night and can be heard trying to break into food stores. Later in the year, across Ladakh, wolves come down from the mountains and prowl around settlements looking for stray livestock. In particularly bad winters, wolves are even occasionally spotted on the edges of Ladakh's urbanised areas, becoming the focus for excited rumours in town. Ghosts seem to accompany these mundane threats, and they are proverbially described as entering villages by night riding on the backs of wild animals. Ghost stories are primarily associated with long winter evenings sitting by the kitchen stove – though their role as winter entertainment has been largely usurped by modern media – and encounters with ghosts are reported more frequently in the colder and darker portion of the year.

The space through which *tsan* and other beings move is enabled, then, by a *lack* of human movement: by the way people withdraw from the outside world, creating a negative space that becomes populated by non-human forces. *Tsan* embody the flipside of human patterns of temporality, being depicted in stories as "like people" (with men, women, and children living in *tsan* villages of their own) but inhabiting an inverted, nocturnal image of human social life. This is most evident in descriptions of their ghost roads, the *tsanlam.* While these are supposedly invisible and impossible for ordinary people to locate, the *tsan* stones and red ochre markings that indicate their presence are ubiquitous: there are few Buddhist houses unadorned by red waymarkers.

On some level, then, we might see *tsan* as presenting a kind of shadow-image of Buddhist Ladakhis. *Tsan* appear as strangers met at night; they travel along roads that follow the routes of human roads; and the houses of Buddhists are marked by colours and designs associated with them. The anxiety that attaches to the invisible roads of the *tsan* and the dangers that they pose are not clearly distinguished from the dangers of ordinary, human roads. Paths and roads attract unchecked movement that brings illness and misfortune, whether from strangers or spirits. An awareness of the village as sustained by lines of movement between the inside and outside, lines that pass across the porous and shifting boundaries that separate the village from the mountains beyond, brings with it an awareness of threat. Roads are dangerous: where people may pass by day, harmful forces move by night.

Conclusion

It would be easy to see the ubiquitous *tsan* stones and red ochre markings as just another species of apotropaic device, and to an extent that is simply what they are. But they are also testaments to a particular way of inhabiting a living, moving world: one in which human movement is shadowed by the movement of harmful forces that flow through areas of settlement after dark. The red stones and markings that appear outside almost every Buddhist house in Ladakh make these flows of movement visible, rendering material human attempts to manage the movement of other beings. Above all, they demonstrate an awareness of the two-sided potential of roads and paths: used by friends and by strangers, by humans and by *tsan*, roads are simultaneously sustaining and afflicting.

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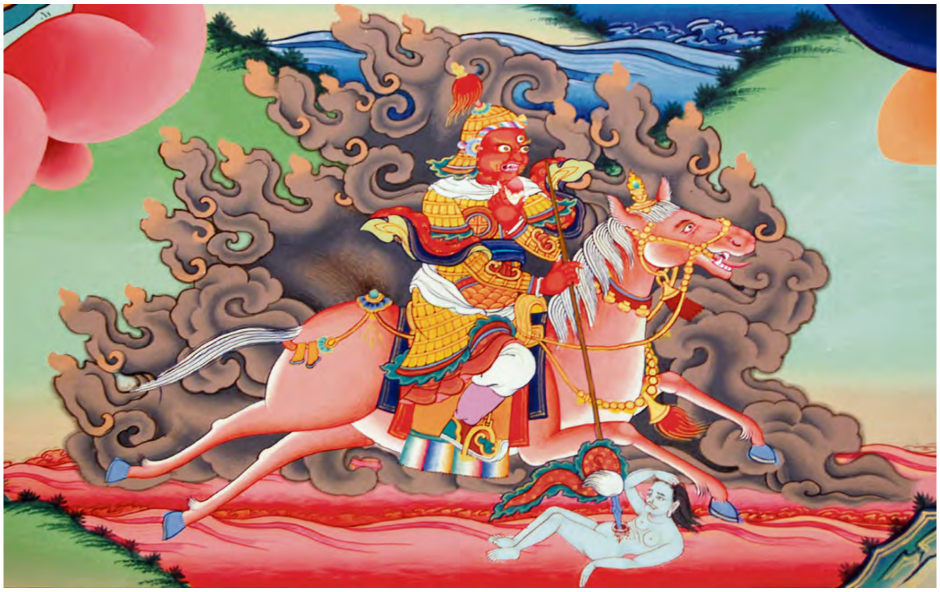


Fig. 4 (above): Protector deity in the form of a *tsan*, Hemis *gompa*, upper Ladakh. (Photo by the author, September 2013)

Notes

[1] See also Pascale Dollfus, "De quelques histoires de *klu* et de *btsan*," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 2 (April 2003): 4–39.

[2] See Eva K. Dargyay, "The White and Red Rong-Btsan of Matho Monastery (Ladakh)," *Journal of the Tibet Society*, no. 5 (1985): 55–65.

[3] Crook noted that in the 1980s Zangskaris spoke of *tsan* and other entities, "with a sort of half-belief, jokingly." See John Crook, "Zangskari Attitudes," in *Himalayan Buddhist Villages*, ed. John Crook and Henry Osmaston (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), 541.

[4] Kaplanian suggests that *tsak* markings indicate that, "this house belongs to the [*tsan*], who will therefore not harm its inhabitants." Patrick Kaplanian, "The Constituent Elements of Architecture and Urbanism in Ladakh," *Cambridge University Ladakh Expedition Reports 1977–1979* (unpublished manuscript, 1979), 136.

[5] See Martin A. Mills, *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism* (London: Routledge, 2003), 258.

[6] Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 2–3, 80–81.

Infrastructure as Gifts in the Karakoram

Thibault Fontanari

In Shimshal Valley in the Karakoram, infrastructures tell the story of the many forms of solidarity the locals mobilised to build them. Whether walking along the paths and bridges leading to refuges and pastures or along the irrigation canals running alongside the fields, walkers stand ready to clear away the stones and landslides that continually obstruct their infrastructure. When locals need to repair foundations or build new ones, they mobilise a donation system and name the structures they build after someone, creating places of prayer and memory.

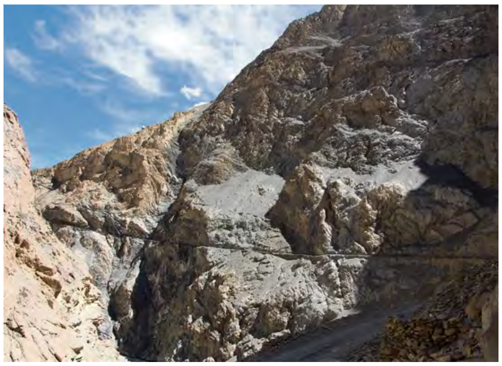
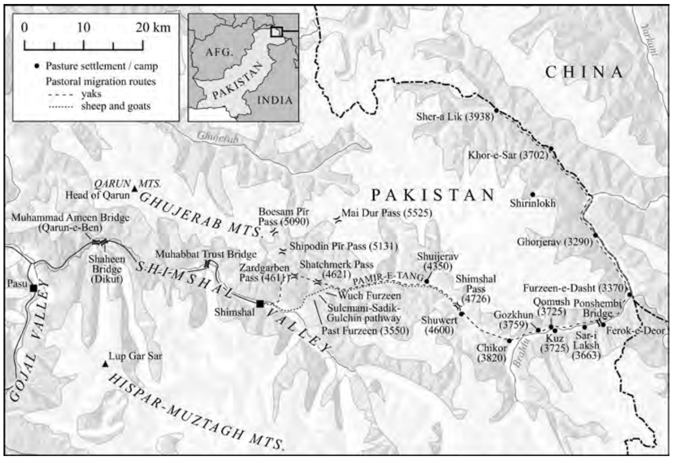


Fig. 1 (left): The Shimshal Road. View of the current road and a section of the old mule track. (Photo by Thibault Fontanari, 2016)

Fig. 2 (below): Map of Shimshal Valley. (Created by Michael Athanson)



Giving while journeying

Shimshal village in Gilgit-Baltistan district in northeastern Pakistan is home to about 225 houses built on a narrow strip of land wedged between the mountains. Being able to channel meltwater from the surrounding glaciers has enabled its inhabitants to irrigate some 150 hectares of potato, barley, and wheat fields. It is also surrounded by pastures in a territory of about 2700 km², where the people herd yaks, sheep, and goats.

Since the beginning of my fieldwork in October 2011, I have been interested in how the herders relied on their relationships of kinship and friendship to face the obstacles they encountered on their journeys together. In this arid and sometimes hostile environment, rockfalls, landslides, and snowstorms are a constant challenge for the herders and their flocks. In rare cases, the landslides can block or destroy parts of paths, and river flooding can wipe out irrigation channels or even houses in the village. To cross a flooded river, repair a stretch of road, or brave a snowstorm in the cold, the inhabitants mobilise to face the obstacle together. This attitude of attention to the environment and of caring for other people who travel through it is called *nang xak* ("to stand by someone") in Wakhi (an oral language), a term that invites us to think about solidarity as an indissociable aspect of journeying.

In 2016, I became fully aware of the importance of how acts of solidarity along the road manifest themselves when travelling to Shimshal from the city of Aliabad, in the Hunza Valley. With two other residents, we took the Karakoram Highway that connects Kashgar in Xinjiang to Mansehra in northern Rawalpindi and runs through the Hunza Valley. We picked up the driver's brother and his cousin on the way and turned east to the Shimshal Valley. After about only thirty minutes, we faced a landslide that blocked the road. Two other jeeps ahead of us had also been forced to stop. Very quickly, the young men left their vehicles and formed a circle around the smallest rock to get a better look. The elders stood behind the young men and pointed out the weak spot on the boulder. The most daring youths tried to smash the rock with a bit of rubble that they passed around, and as they did, it became emblematic of the bond that connected people, just as the road itself was our mutual connector and the ground on which we generated our social life. Roads, rocks, and rubble thus revealed a form of agency – they were central to collective mobilization and the enactment of solidarity.

The "Right Path"

Herders are accustomed to mountain footpaths that navigate the rugged landscape in winding ways and whose narrowness often forces the walkers to adopt a certain position in relation to one another. This exercise, in hierarchical patriarchal communities like Wakhi Ismaili of Shimshal, is far from trivial, for one's position depends on one's age and gender, but also on the prestige that one receives by performing actions in accordance with Ismaili principles. Like any other "imaginary," as anthropologist Maurice Godelier explains, it is a founding myth that associates the human social hierarchy with the one which governs the world of metahumans, and thereby gives meaning to relations of sovereignty – in other words, the political and religious relations that shape all social positions in a given society.[1]

One of the distinctive elements of the Ismaili community is that its spiritual guide, the Imam (descended from the line of Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law), guides his followers by delivering his *farman* ("messages") every new moon through a complex network of religious institutions.[2] These messages are religious values and practical pieces of advice that constitute a guideline for the material success and spiritual development of Ismaili followers. The inhabitants summarize it as "the Right Path." In Shimshal's daily life, it is by taking care of horizontal relationships developed with other beings that one progresses vertically towards God. Wakhi herders and farmers embody these values through walking every time they take up their spatial positions on roads and pathways and act accordingly, in solidarity.

People progress in society through their cooperation with others as they walk with them, in accordance with this social imaginary, and this is what people in Shimshal consider to be the Right Path. The more they give of themselves to help others to safely reach their destination, the more deference and social recognition they receive, and the more they progress spiritually. In this context, social recognition is about performing a gesture of deference towards someone else that symbolises and reproduces a particular social order.[3] In other words, as they confront obstacles along the way, the inhabitants act according to the affordances of footpaths and roads, but they also conform to the social hierarchy.

Infrastructure as gift

Clearing a road blocked by falling stones, unblocking an irrigation canal obstructed by a landslide, or reinforcing the weakened walls of an irrigation canal following a heavy influx of water are ordinary constraints for the inhabitants of Shimshal. However, while it just takes a few people to carry out these actions, these individuals would not be able to repair such structures entirely or build new ones on their own. The construction and repair of these structures is virtually only possible through a complex system of donations.

This was especially true with the mule track, the route that preceded the Shimshal road [Fig. 1]. Before 1982, the people who made the journey to Shimshal Valley would walk on this track for three days, and many elders still suffer knee pain from carrying too many heavy loads of material and food over the years. They would have to cross the Shimshal river 40 times, mostly fording, risking being swept away at any moment by the powerful flow of icy waters. To ease the many crossings along this mule track, the locals built wooden bridges and opened new paths along the mountain wall, sometimes even digging stairs in the rock. To do so, they mobilised a specific form of gift-giving called *nomʉs* – not unlike the Arabic term *nāmūs* (ناموس, "law, honour"), itself derived from the concept of *nomos* (νόμος) in Greek, that is, "the law or social rule." Simply put, the rule of *nomʉs* is that "the family gives wealth and the volunteers give health." In other words, "the family gives its resources and the workers their labour force." Usually, members of an extended family (*sʉkʉin*) invite other lineages of the village to share a meal, during which they announce their intention to build a collective edifice. The sponsoring family makes food as well as material and financial resources available to the other households, who will in turn contribute their labour force to build the structure. Each construction that the *nomʉs* makes possible will become a place of memory and prayer and, by making the journey easier, will encourage walkers to address prayers and wishes to the namesake and to all those who contributed to its development. Similarly to *nang xak*, the organisation of gifts in a *nomʉs* occurs at the crossroads of the inhabitants' physical and spiritual journey. By building a structure for the community, sponsors and builders trace their spiritual way to God, and when they walk on their mountain footpaths, they pray for the salvation of the eponym's soul.

If the notion of *nang xak* brings to the fore the relationship between giving and walking, that of *nomʉs* does so with regard to giving and infrastructure. *Nomʉs* depends on the negotiation between the participants who combine two types of gift (financial and material resources and labour force). Therefore, while *nang xak* is a pre-reflexive yet profoundly social form of giving, *nomʉs* is the result of a complex decision-making process between the participants. The two notions are nonetheless inextricably linked. The *nomʉs* reflects a collective consensus and action on the built environment of the community territory in accordance with the Ismaili imaginary, but it is based equally on a practical knowledge of the built environment. People make the decision to build a *nomʉs* whenever a group of walkers belonging to a particular lineage finds a new path to a pasture, or when a path that members of the lineage use collapses, or if they seek to gain more arable land by building a new irrigation canal. In all these circumstances they can make their interests converge with those of other lineages to honour the name and save the soul of one of their own.

The circulation of the gifts on the roads

According to some of the people with whom I spoke, the inhabitants had been practicing this form of giving since they settled in the village, which dates back to the beginning of Hunza principality in the 15th century. Others refer to oral testimonies and to still-visible vestiges, the oldest of

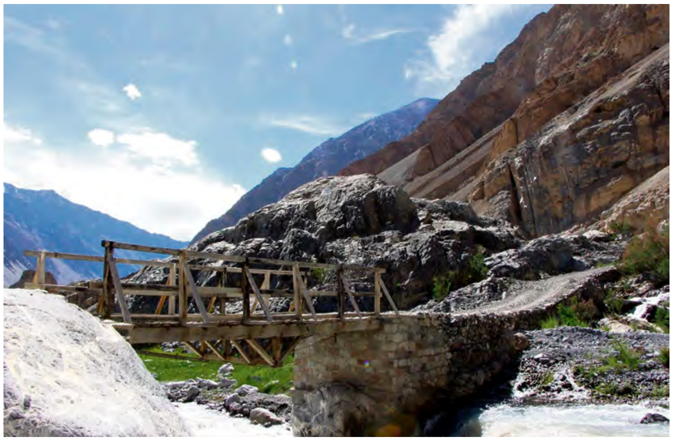


Fig. 3 (above): The "Muhabbat Trust Bridge." (Photo by the author, 2016)

which date from the beginning of the 20th century. What seems most important to note, perhaps, is that although the way people combined their gifts has remained relatively similar, the type of infrastructure built, the groups participating in *nomus*, and their motivations to do so have changed since the beginning of the 20th century with the comings and goings of the inhabitants on the Karakoram road network.

By connecting the villages and pastures of the rural areas to the cities, roads have become the ground on which the inhabitants have made unprecedented cultural contact with other inhabitants and communities of the region. As Harvey, Bruun Jensen, and Morita have argued, infrastructure and society mutually shape one another throughout time.[4] In the Karakoram, and among the Wakhis in particular, tracing the development of herders' road networks thus amounts to charting a history of these forms of solidarity and belonging to the territory and the environment.

In Shimshal, what is known today as *nomus* seems to have been imposed on subjects by the prince Muhammad Nazim Khan of Hunza (1892-1938), primarily to serve the interests of his state. To do so, he relied on the coercive power relationship his predecessors had enforced in Wakhi communities at the turn of the 19th century. This power relationship resulted in the imposition of annual taxes on Wakhi communities of the valley, which generated a stratification of lineages between those who could pay them and those who could not. Those who could not pay the tax directly had to carry their taxes on foot to the prince's court in the form of agriculture and livestock.[5] It was from among the wealthiest lineages that the prince appointed a representative to implement this policy. It was also through them that the prince forced his subjects to accept material resources and to use them to build structures. The prince himself sponsored at least two such structures in Shimshal: a stretch of pathway named after his mother, Qorban Begum, and a bridge on the old mule track built in the name of Muhammad Ameen, the father of Ponshembi, the village chief. Just after the completion of these works in approximately 1920, Ponshembi and his son, Ghulam Nasir, sponsored another *nomus*, a bridge over the Shimshal river far in the east, close to Darwaza, the place where the principality's defensive walls stood [Fig. 2]. While the first two were intended to facilitate the flow of taxes, the third was intended to provide easier access to the principality's only salt mines, from which the less fortunate lineages of Shimshal had to extract the precious mineral and bring it to the prince.

Nomus remained in place even after the last prince of Hunza was deposed in 1974 and the Hunza Valley was administratively integrated into Pakistan. Henceforth, the sponsors would mainly be the wealthiest lineages of the village, even though many historical structures prove that the other lineages contributed greatly to infrastructural development. Even when Pakistan and the NGO the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) became involved in the development of the Shimshal road, which would replace the old mule track, the *nomus* proved essential in filling in many sections. This can be seen today with the Muhabbat Trust Bridge built in 1999 [Fig. 3], a structure whose name pays tribute not only to its eponym, Muhabbat, but also to the collaboration between the locals and the members of the AKRSP.

Walking and the archaeology of forms of giving

Highways, asphalt-paved or stone roads, trails, or pathways differ in terms of the materials from which they are made, the construction techniques used to build them, and the religious, political, or even geostrategic reasons that prompted workers, sponsors, or contractors to devote themselves to the work. At Shimshal, this diversity also extends to the mountain footpaths themselves. Their typology is so rich that in July 2016, while we were visiting the summer pastures, one of my partners ventured a comic comparison to answer my umpteenth question about the history of mountain paths: "You French-speakers have 400 names to describe your cheeses, so we have just as many to name our pathways." In the Karakoram, when you hit the road, you have to expect to travel on many different routes. This diversity does not easily lend itself to hierarchisation. Not all pathways become roads as the Shimshal mule track did, and when the Shimshal road is blocked for long weeks by a landslide that a few travellers are unable to clear, the local people follow new, ephemeral trails.

The locals rebuild the sections of path destroyed by rockfalls, landslides, or erosion, and do not hesitate to rename the sections they improve. This happened to an old *perien* ("staircase-shaped pathway") that a family, the Bari, built in the late 1960s in the name of a woman, Gulchin [Fig. 4]. Between 2009 and 2012, the woman's son Sadiq rebuilt the lower section in the name of his wife, Sulemani, and the upper one in his own name. This is how pathways create a palimpsest, and the walkers who tread them retrace the history of their builders, of the different infrastructures, of their users, and finally, of the paths themselves. A history of these pathways must therefore consider them not only as connectors between places, but also as places of connection between humans and non-humans, such as animals, dead people, or deities.

The history of the diversity of roads and pathways sheds light on the multiple forms of solidarity that builders mobilised to develop and rebuild them. The descriptions given above demonstrate the reciprocal role of roads and paths in the implementation of forms of solidarity, whether the latter be the result of pre-reflexive, direct, immediate, phenomenal, and ephemeral collective action, or rather planned, thought-out, and strategic action. Surveying the roads and paths ultimately amounts to experiencing them as agents who generate forms of solidarity. It also means tracing their history, which, like the paths, has nothing linear about it and is necessarily linked to the political and religious relationships of its protagonists.[6]

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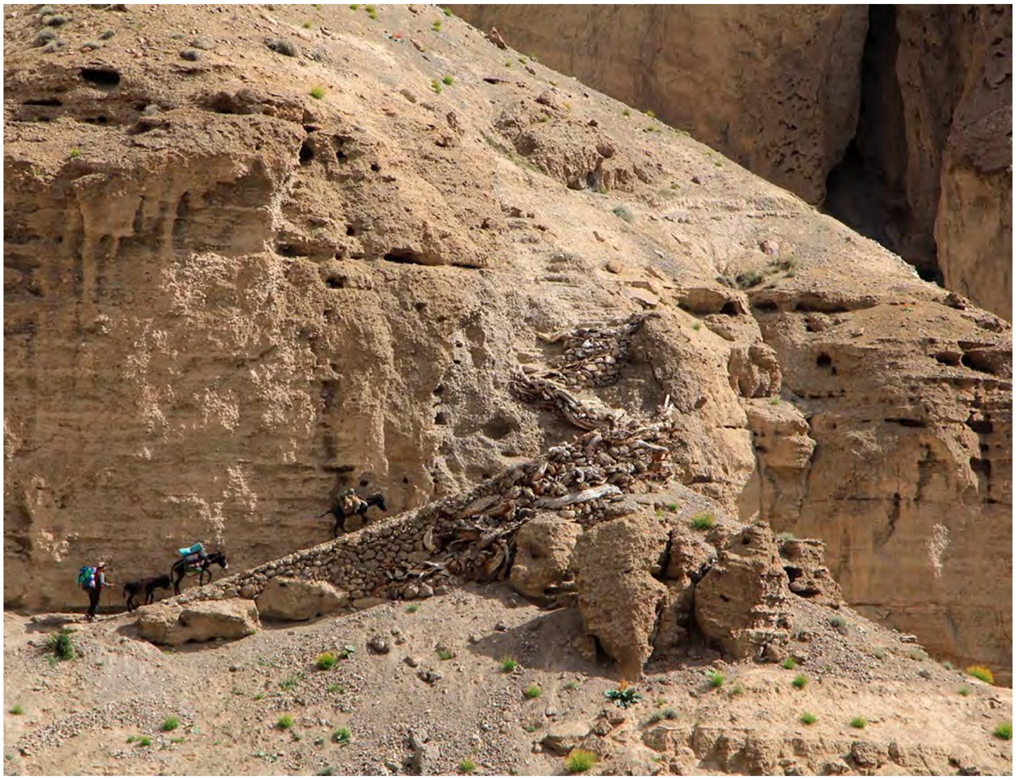

Fig. 4 (above): The Sulemani and Sadiq Pathway built between 2009 and 2012 on the old Gulchin Pathway, constructed for the first time in the late 1960s. Gulchin was the mother-in-law of Sulemani and the mother of Sadiq. (Photo by the author, 2016)

Notes

[1] Maurice Godelier, *The Imagined, the Imaginary and the Symbolic* (New York: Verso, 2020), 62; Maurice Godelier, *La production des grands hommes: pouvoir et domination masculine chez les Baruya de Nouvelle-Guinée* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009).

[2] Jonah Steinberg described them in detail in his book *Isma'ili Modern: Globalization and Identity in a Muslim Community* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

[3] Or, as Hénaff would put it, social recognition is about expressing one's respect for another by acknowledging their status. See Marcel Hénaff, *Le don des philosophes : repenser la réciprocité* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 204.

[4] Penelope Harvey , Casper Bruun Jensen, and Asturo Morita, "Introduction: Infrastructural complications", in *Infrastructures and social complexity: A companion*, ed. Penelope Harvey, Casper Bruun Jensen, and Asturo Morita, 1-22 (London: Routledge, 2017), 12.

[5] Hermann Kreutzmann, *Pamirian Crossroads. Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015), 407-412.

[6] I would like to express my deep gratitude to the inhabitants of the village of Shimshal, who gave me hospitality and educated not only my body to walk their mountain pathways, but also my conscience to the importance of walking, taking care of the infrastructures, and remembering the names of those who built them. I would also like to extend my warmest thanks to Stéphane Gros, editor of the Focus section, for his meticulous editing work, which has considerably improved this text.

Fig. 1: Collecting fodder in Pathakpur fields. (Photo by the author, March 2017)

Gendered Fields of Constitutional Politics

Women's Routines and the Negotiation of Territorial Belonging in Nepal's Far Western Tarai

Amy Johnson

Recent constitution writing and province delineation in post-conflict Nepal inspired popular reflection on the meaning of belonging to the Nepali nation-state, bringing sensitive questions around social and spatial origins to the fore of national and sub-regional politics. In the borderlands of Kailali district in Nepal's Far Western Tarai, settlement dynamics amongst Indigenous Tharu and Hill-origin persons has generated a charged scene for adjudicating constitutional provisions for social inclusion and territorial recognition. Women navigate legacies of migration and social difference during their daily mobilities and everyday routines, extending national politics into gendered fields of labor and belonging.

Origins and destinations

"Where have you come from?" is a standard greeting exchanged by friends and strangers crossing paths on Nepal's roads and foot trails. Whether asked at the outset of a day's trip to agricultural fields or at the end of a jolting bus ride to Kathmandu, answering it invites the respondent and questioner into a social geography facilitated through idiosyncratic relationships to places near and far.

In regions that have experienced repeated waves of migration and settlement, such as the lowland Tarai-Madhes region along the southern Nepal-India border [Fig. 2], talking about where one starts the day, and where one might end up, can facilitate a sense of connection amongst people moving across a shared but differently experienced landscape. It can also shift conversation toward another kind of origin: family. While ostensibly seeking a point of connection between unfamiliar persons, such inquiries probe for information about an individual's affiliated caste and ethnicity, which can either be the basis for inclusion in or exclusion from the social world of questioner and respondent.

Throughout much of Nepal, questions about social and spatial origins are a routine part of daily life. Yet in the decades since the end of the ten-year conflict between the Communist Party Nepal-Maoist and the Government of Nepal in 2006, such inquiries have gained heightened significance. In the aftermath of the conflict, Nepali citizens embarked on a joint project of constitution writing and state restructuring in the hopes of resolving longstanding social tensions in Nepal surrounding the discrimination of marginalized groups and regional underdevelopment.[1] Over the course of two elected Constituent Assemblies between 2008 and 2015, lawmakers worked to design constitutional provisions for social inclusion and demarcate new federal provinces.[2] Arranging legal boundaries for social inclusion and territorial boundaries for provinces raised important conversations amongst the Nepali public about the past and present identity of the Nepali nation-state and ways of belonging to it. For many, this was an anxious time filled with competing visions of Nepal's future form.[3] Constitutional and territorial models of the future Nepali state diverged strongly in the southern Tarai-Madhes region. Along the southern borderlands, competing demands for federal province-based territorial recognition raised by Indigenous, caste Hindu, and other regional Tarai-Madhes groups brought lived experiences and historical legacies of Tarai-Madhes migration and settlement to the foreground of contemporary regional and national constitutional politics.

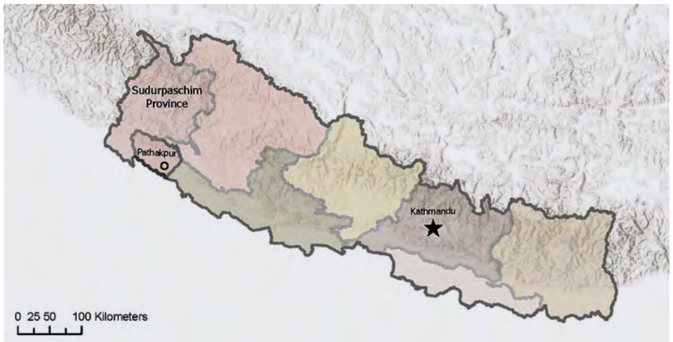

Fig. 2: Nepal's Far West Province (Sudurpaschim Province) featuring Kailali district and the approximate location of Pathakpur (a pseudonym). (Map prepared by author)

Kailali district, in the Far Western Tarai, was especially affected by Nepal's post-conflict federalism politics. The Tharu community, an Indigenous Tarai group, supported the creation of Tharuhat or Tharuwan, a province recognizing the Tarai as the Tharu homeland. Meanwhile, other residents of the region, many of whom who had origins and ancestors in the Hills, advocated for the formation of a Hill-Tarai integrated province through a regional political movement called Akhanda Sudurpaschim, or United Far West. In September 2015, the constitution was promulgated and a new map of federal provinces was demarcated. Many residents of the Tarai-Madhes, including those of Kailali district, voiced their dissatisfaction with the map and constitution, proclaiming that it failed to generate the socio-political transformation promised by the state restructuring project. The map did not demarcate provinces championed by Indigenous peoples, such as the Tharu. Instead, six of the seven provinces included on the final federal map followed the integrated Hill-Tarai model for provinces supported by groups such as the United Far West. The lack of recognition for the homelands and territorial attachments of Indigenous peoples on the federal map undermined public faith in provisions for social inclusion outlined in the constitution. In the months and years after the constitution's promulgation, unresolved tensions around the federal system and the federal map thickened the air in Kailali. They resonated in mundane interactions and conversations, extending the field of politics into the routines of everyday life.

Routine politics

In Fall 2016, a year after the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal and a year before the delineation and implementation of local federal units, my Tharu confidants Meena and Anju and I set out to spend the afternoon gathering fodder grass in a neighbor's field a mile or so from the women's homes in a village (which I anonymize as Pathakpur) in eastern Kailali district. Collecting fodder grass was a daily activity for us [Fig. 1 and 3]. I learned how to identify good and poor grasses for goats and buffaloes and how to tell the difference between familiars and strangers according to Meena and Anju's studied criteria. On this afternoon, Meena and Anju were joking loudly while filling their repurposed grain sacks with grasses, and they missed the sound of approaching footsteps pushing through the tall wheat plants. She startled us, this woman, small and bent, when she tossed down her woven basket from her back and lifted her arms up in greeting. Rising steadily with her sickle in hand, Meena looked the woman up and down before calling out to her: *"Budhi, kahaa batta aayo?"* (Nepali for "Old woman, where have you come from?"). With her own sickle, the woman gestured behind her to a cluster of mud-plastered houses barely visible on the horizon. The distant houses were established by people who had settled in Kailali from the Far Western Hill district of Doti. Meena took notice of the grass filling the woman's well-used basket, and I watched Meena calculate the size of the load to the woman's frail frame. "Who's helping you?" Meena asked, again in Nepali. A short thin boy rose soundlessly from the field. His lean legs kicked out at the basket lying at the older woman's feet. "This one helps me," she responded rustily. In short sentences she told how she came from Doti two months ago to live with her son and his family after her husband died. "There was nothing in the hills for me after his death," she explained, "only drought and hardship. But here too life is hard," she added, gesturing to her basket. Sharing a look with Meena, the woman kneeled to the ground while the boy hefted the load onto her back. With a heave, she lifted her basket and secured its strap to her forehead, nodding to us in farewell.

Meena and Anju sucked their teeth watching the woman's head duck in and out of sight across the fields. Her presence that afternoon gave us a point of contrast to mark the differences between our lives. For Meena and Anju, the fields were part of their daily realm of work and routine, and they reached them from Tharu-established villages where they have lived nearly all their lives. Their movements into and out of the fields weave the landscape into an ever-tightening social fabric they feel as home. But it is a landscape where they have grown accustomed to speaking first in Nepali, not Tharu, when encountering an unfamiliar person like the older woman, whose own mother tongue is likely not Nepali but a Far Western Hill language such as Doteli. As we headed for our own house, Meena turned to me and said, "I feel so sad for these Pahadi [Hill origin] women. They come here lost."

Her words reminded me of the poem "Sala Pahadme Kya Hai?" ("What's in these Bastard Hills?") by Nepali poet Minbahadur Bista, published in 1983:

Young sons are walking out,
leaving the places they were born,
taking loved ones with them,
carrying bags, neatly tied
with red kerchiefs on their shoulders,
khukhuri knives hang from their waists,
dull and unpolished for years;
they tell their sick old parents
to look after homes, homes which are lifeless.[4]

In this small encounter, Meena's question – "Where are you coming from?" – extended into an unasked, yet eventually answered, question: "Where are you from?" They were asked to ascertain spatial position on the landscape as well as social position among the multi-stranded ties people have to Kailali. Their significance stands in further relief in the context of Kailali district's importance as a popular destination for internal and international migration and as a historically important frontier of the Nepali nation-state.

Basai-sarai (residence-shift)

In Kailali, the Tharu, an Indigenous Tarai group living along both sides of the international border, are recognized as the area's original residents. Alliances brokered with Tharu elites in the 18th century and earlier afforded political powers in North India and Kathmandu a toe hold of authority in the southern lowlands. Yet, for the most part, distance, dense forests, and virulent malaria slowed the arrival of non-Tharu to the Far Western Tarai over what is thought of as the long 19th century. Instead, a seasonal rhythm of movement into and out of the region was observed as folks, predominately men, from the Hills and Gangetic Plain arrived over winter months to grow crops and trade before the onset of monsoon and malaria transmission.

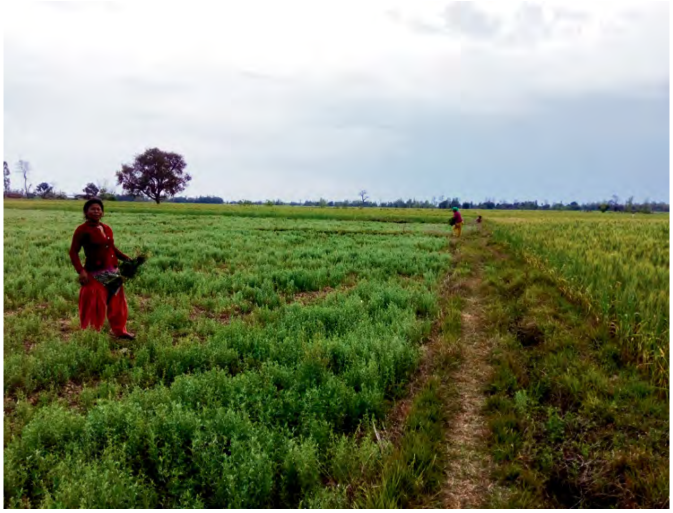

Fig. 3: Two agricultural plots where Mena and Anju collect fodder. (Photo by the author, March 2017)

However, by the mid-20th century, the Nepali government had begun to experiment with technologies of environmental management, most importantly indoor residual spraying with DDT for mosquito population control. The advent of malaria eradication in the Tarai altered the rhythm of seasonal mobility and encouraged peoples from near and far to move into Kailali for land and opportunity.[5] The Nepali government attempted to keep the wave of population transfer in check through techniques of population control, such as the creation of planned settlement colonies and land redistribution programs, as well as punishing individuals living on state-controlled forest land with jail and the destruction of their homes and property. Eventually these measures gave way, and Kailali's population boomed in the second half of the 20th century, rising from 128,877 in 1971[6] to 616,697 in 2001.[7]

While historians of Nepal focus on the mid-20th century as the moment of the Tarai's demographic transformation, migration into the Far Western Tarai is still underway. The 2021 Census of Nepal[8] indicates that migration or *basai-sarai* (residence-shift) remains high in Kailali. Out of a population of 904,666, Kailali counts 571,061 persons as enumerated in the same place (local administrative unit) where they were born. Respondents indicating that they were born elsewhere in Kailali district from where they were enumerated numbered 71,747. A much higher number of respondents (245,841) state that they were born elsewhere in Nepal. Respondents relating that they were born outside Nepal, likely in neighboring India, numbered 15,626.

Comparing results from the 2011 and 2021 censuses underscores the continued shifts of people and language use in Kailali district. In 2011, 41 percent of the total population of Kailali reported speaking Tharu as a first language. The 2021 census used more discrete language categories than recorded in earlier censuses, differentiating Tharu and Rana Tharu languages. Yet even when combining numbers of Tharu and Rana Tharu first language speakers, the overall percentage of reported first-language Tharu speakers in Kailali decreased to 38 percent in 2021. Meanwhile Nepali first-language speakers increased between 2011 to 2021 from 27 to 36 percent. Languages such as Doteli, Acchami, Magar, Maithili, and Hindi were spoken by over 0.5 percent of Kailali residents in both 2011 and 2021, although numbers of Doteli speakers decreased overall from approximately 19 to 14 percent. These results suggest that significant monitories of Kailali residents include people with linguistic ties to the Far Western Hills (Doteli, Acchami, Magar), the Central and Eastern Tarai (Maithili), and North India (Hindi).

The municipality I have anonymized as Pathakpur, however, has experienced less demographic change between 2011 and 2021 than the district overall, maintaining a majority Tharu-speaking population. Before being consolidated into the newly established Pathakpur municipality in 2017, the two Village Development Committees which today make up Pathakpur were recorded by the 2011 census as having a much higher percentage of Tharu residents than the district average. Eighty-five percent of the population in one unit and 72 percent in the other reported being Tharu. They also claimed Tharu as their mother tongue, making Tharu the most spoken language in both units. After the Tharu language, Doteli, Nepali, and Achhami were recorded to be spoken most frequently as a first language in both administrative units in 2011. In 2021, 79 percent of Pathakpur residents identified as Tharu and reported the Tharu language as their mother tongue. Meanwhile, 4407 persons selected Doteli as their first language, followed by 2610 Nepali and 539 Achhami first-language speakers. These linguistic signs tell of near and distant ancestral origins for people who live in Pathakpur. But they also communicate continuity in place for Pathakpur's Tharu and Hill origin residents. The combination of residence shift and intergenerational place-making underscores the intensity of territorial politics around belonging to Kailali in the era of constitution writing and federal restructuring.

Signposts

Asking someone about where they have come from prompts a follow-up question: "Where are you going?" Where are places like Pathakpur, districts like Kailali, and women like Meena, Anju, and the old Pahadi woman headed in the newly federal Nepal? The future is uncharted. But there are signs that the future will look very different from Nepal's past. Already, Pathakpur has aligned itself with the pro-Tharu Nagarik Unmukti Party, the People's Freedom Party. The Nagarik Unmukti Party was established by Ranjeeta Shrestha on behalf of her husband, the Sudur Paschim Province House of Representatives lawmaker and activist Resham Chaudhary. Resham Chaudhary was released from prison in June 2023 after being delivered a life sentence for his alleged involvement in the 2015 Tikapur Incident, in which security personnel and a toddler were killed during fighting that broke out at a Tharuhat/Tharuwan rally on the eve of the constitution's promulgation. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Pathakpur in 2023 also belong to the Nagarik Unmukti Party and are Tharu. The election of Tharu candidates and the use of Tharu language in government offices has removed barriers for Tharu access to local government that had long been felt in the region.

Tharu speakers, like Meena and Anju, and Pahadi residents in Pathakpur will continue to navigate each other's lives across a district landscape they share as a consequence of the ebbs and flows of migration, settlement, and nation-state building in Nepal's Far Western Tarai. But their negotiations today can be seen to proceed on more even footing than in the past. Who can answer "Where are you going?" with so many destinations in sight?

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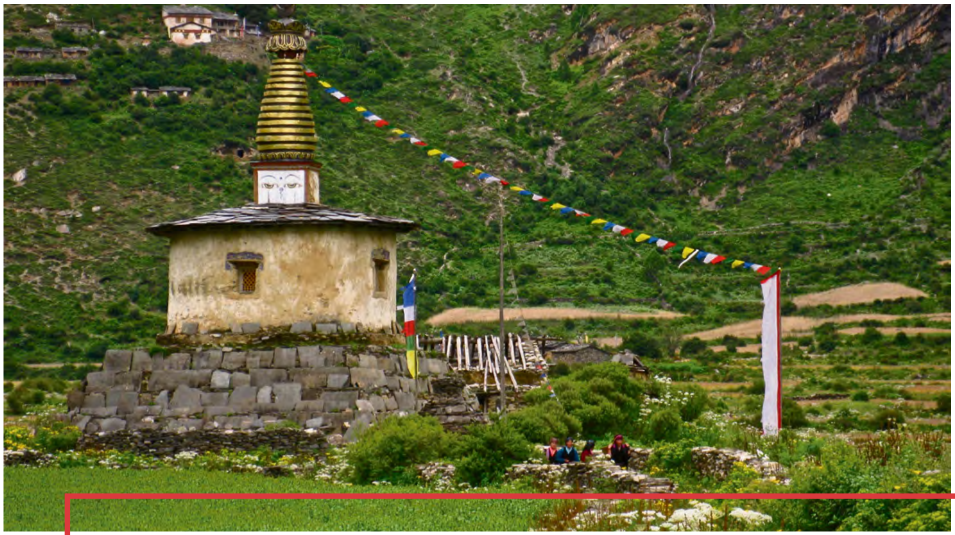

Fig. 1 (left): Chorten Jangchub Namgyal in the upper Tsum Valley. (Photograph by Nadine Plachta, 2012)

Stories of Infrastructure and Environmental Justice in Nepal

Nadine Plachta

For Indigenous communities living in remote Himalayan areas of Nepal, infrastructural developments are agents of profound change. Their resource-based livelihoods and the location of their homes in vulnerable environments make them particularly sensitive to road construction. The Tsum Valley in the Manaslu Conservation Area is one such place where government narratives and local Indigenous imaginaries of infrastructural futures diverge. Rather than opposing the construction of a new road, people advocate for the respect of Indigenous relations to land and kin.

On a clear winter morning in January 2014, I stood on the veranda of Dhawa Gyanjen's house in Tsum, a long mountain valley in the Nepal Himalaya, bordering the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). The sky was a bright blue, and frost glistened damply on the grass of the front yard. The days had grown increasingly cold. I was watching a group of villagers who sat in a circle on plastic chairs in the warmth of the high-altitude sun, debating the arrival of a long-anticipated road. "What good is a road if it does not go from village to village?" asked a man sporting a faded blue sweater, his eyes shaded with sunglasses. "It will risk the pollution of our river and streams," responded another, with thin graying hair hanging loose over his shoulders. "Besides," the latter said, turning more serious, "it might also cause damage to our ancestral places." A girl from a neighboring house in the village appeared, filling up cups of steaming tea for everyone from a thermos.

The heavy construction machine that was clearing ground for a motorable road through Tsum and up to the Tibetan border had reached the village boundary about a week prior. Having removed soil and scrub across mountain pastures and below cliffsides for the past several months, the excavator was now parked for the barren winter, when the valley sits beneath thick blankets of snow. Dhawa, who lives in Kathmandu but was in Tsum to visit his aging father, had sent handwritten letters to elders and knowledge holders of all remaining villages along the planned road, calling on them to discuss its further alignment after snowmelt in spring. People needed to decide the road's route through the valley if they did not want it to follow the alignment established by government engineers, which would have considerable effects on Indigenous relations to land and kin. Should the road follow the northern banks of the Shyar Khola, the main river running through the valley, and bypass some villages but protect sensitive mountain landscapes? Or, instead, should it cross the river more than once, lead through all remaining villages, and potentially damage the interconnected network of human and other-than-human beings that sustain Indigenous life? The people who gathered in Dhawa's front yard had already been discussing the matter for hours.

Members of the Indigenous Tsum community had been asking the government for a road since the region was opened for controlled tourism in 2008. At that time, the nearest domestic road head was in Arughat, a sprawling market town along the Budhi Gandaki River, a five day walk to the south, from where one could reach Kathmandu in another day by bus. Daily essentials, such as rice, salt, and tea, but also kitchen utensils, batteries, and clothes were imported from Arughat on mules via a footpath that was often precarious during summer, when monsoon rain washed away sections in landslides. A less treacherous, and much shorter, route was to cross the mountain pass into China, where a dirt road puckered with potholes snaked downhill to merge with a highway that led to the larger town of Dzongka. For people in Tsum, a road connecting these two loose ends embodied development; it promised economic growth, job opportunities, education, and health care. Yet when the government, over a period of two years in 2011 and 2012, sent engineers to the region to conduct a feasibility study and sketch a detailed plan of the road, the situation quickly turned awry.

In what follows, I present the story, through pictures and text, of what went wrong. I analyze and interpret tensions at the intersection of Indigenous knowledge systems and state-led development programs to highlight the different actors, political stakes, and invested perspectives that continuously collide amidst current infrastructure projects in Nepal. In doing so, I bring attention to the critical role of local communities in Himalayan homelands – and help to amplify another kind of story that is sometimes silenced by the noise from political centers.

The promise (and perils) of infrastructure in Nepal

Infrastructure appears at the center of current political debates in Nepal. It is framed as a nation-building project of a fledgling democratic state, and the Nepali government is seeking to build roads to every town and sizable settlement in the country.[1] Promising to boost regional development and introduce new forms of mobility, these paved, gravel, and dirt roads are part of an ambitious effort to strengthen rural livelihoods after a social movement ended the decade-long civil war in 2006. According to national development narratives, roads will ultimately lead to greater wellbeing by extending market relations to hill and mountainous areas, which have some of the lowest road densities in the world.[2]

Governing the allocation of resources for road construction projects in Nepal is the National Planning Commission (NPC). Since its establishment in 1956, the NPC has been implementing a series of periodic infrastructure development plans. Each of these periodic plans specifies development policies and programs under a national vision, and road building has continuously been given the highest priority to help consolidate a modern bureaucratic state. Once the government approves a road project and a registered construction firm emerges successfully from the tendering process, the firm outsources work to local contractors, creating a broker economy of both public and private actors.

Social anthropologist Brian Larkin writes that infrastructures, roads included, are ultimately matter that enable the movement of other matter. They facilitate material flows and allow for their exchange across space.[3] But roads also exceed their most obvious form. "In contrast to their representations on maps as seemingly smooth and straightforward lines," Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi explains, roads are also "a place of experiencing, a place where ideas, things and relationships come into being and fall apart."[4] The capacity to connect and disconnect is a persistent feature of infrastructures. Roads bring resources, opportunities, and relations within reach of some, while often restricting them for others. They do not simply reflect existing inequalities, but may engineer and entrench new forms. In other words, roads shape life in profound and sometimes unexpected ways.[5]

The complex material and social realities of roads are visible across Nepal's Himalayan regions. It is here that infrastructure development ties closely into practices of mapping, itself a process of control that political scientist James Scott identifies as a territorial tool through which states make geographically remote places more legible.[6] Especially for Indigenous Peoples living in hill and mountainous areas, the idea of a road is a highly contested one.[7] Their multiple forms of relatedness with the environment stand in stark contrast with the expansion of capitalist frontiers and resource extraction pushed by the government. Consequently, infrastructure development programs are often seen as a continuity of the historical marginalization and dispossession that Indigenous Peoples have been facing in Nepal. Recent calls for Indigenous sovereignty and environmental justice are increasingly pointing out violent infrastructure practices in an effort to protect land, mountains, and water, thus challenging linear narratives of development emanating from the capital Kathmandu.

Infrastructure and Indigenous relations of ethics and care

Once the intense debate between the villagers who had gathered in Dhawa's front yard ceased, one after another prepared to leave. The atmosphere was tense. Having reached no agreement on an alternative road alignment through Tsum, they pledged to resume the conversation the next day. I wondered what had happened that motivated people to oppose current road construction plans so vehemently. Having sensed my interest in the matter, Dhawa's father invited his son and me to a more comfortable seating arrangement inside the house. Tsering Phuntsok had high cheekbones and a beguiling smile. He used to be a savvy trader but now, at age seventy-four, he spent most of his days taking yaks from the village to high alpine pastures. Tsering Phuntsok pulled out a plastic jug filled with *arak*, the local whiskey distilled from barley, and sloshed some of the clear liquor in three stained ceramic cups. He then reminisced about his encounter with the development planners in Tsum: "I was walking home from a local pasture when I saw the engineers doing their work. They carried survey instruments and measuring tapes and, along the main footpath meandering through the valley, painted red signs on our gompas, *khani*, *chorten*, and *mani* walls, mapping

OFFICIAL SELECTION
IMFFD
INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL DOMZALE
OFFICIAL SELECTION
KIMFF
KATHMANDU INTERNATIONAL MOUNTATIN FILM FESTIVAL

Fig. 2 (left): Film Poster for *Mani: The Hidden Valley of Happiness at a Crossroads.* (Poster by Sonam Lama)

where the road would go."[8] The unexpected meeting with the engineers was a crucial moment for the elderly man – and one that changed his perception of development.

In Tsum, *chorten*, *khani*, and *mani* walls are spiritual as well as geographic markers, as they protect people and territories and are embedded in everyday place-making practices [Fig. 1]. Made of rocks and carved stones, these markers are found in villages, on ridges and hillocks, as well as along walking trails. Together with mountains, lakes, and trees, they form part of a complex landscape that is animated by other-than-human beings that bestow blessings, generating the conditions for human life to flourish. Human inhabitants, in turn, maintain their relatedness with the animated landscape through institutions, narratives, and bodily practices, such as circumambulating these markers and performing prostrations, or by integrating them into larger pilgrimage circuits. This interconnected system of responsibilities creates a sense of place and home for the local community. If disrupted, environmental calamities (e.g., storms, landslides, and droughts) or sicknesses are believed to likely follow. Tsering Phuntsok pointed out that while it seemed easiest to build the road along the locally used walking trail, it would inevitably damage some of these ancestral places and thus violently disrupt villagers' embodied practices of care for the land and its beings.

Talking with Sonam Lama, a professionally trained architect and community member based in Kathmandu, I learned that the Tsum road was categorized as a "national highway" under the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport's Strategic Road Network. Under this project, the road would connect the mountainous region to the district capital Gorkha and further to the Madan Ashrit Highway near Bharatpur in the southern Terai, along the border with India. The Madan Ashrit Highway currently carries 90 percent of all international traffic in the country, and its extension to the Chinese border in the Himalayan highlands would create an economic corridor with significant trade and transport prospects.

Sonam further explained that, as a national highway, the road in Tsum was expected to have a width of about ten meters – a scope that would make it profoundly impactful in many ways. Ecologically, for example, it would quickly become a major source of pollution for agricultural fields and grazing grounds and, therefore, would severely affect customary traditions of environmental management such as seasonal irrigation systems. Sonam's face mirrored this concern. The architect took a deep breath, choosing his words carefully: "Coming from the lowlands, the engineers didn't know about our various relationships with the land. But they also didn't ask us." Sonam indicated that the government failed to consider the environmental consequences of the road. Known as a standard Environmental Impact Assessment, this procedure is used to identify likely adverse impacts before decisions about a proposed development project are made. Impact assessments are technically mandatory in Nepal under the Environmental Protection Act (1996) and Environment Protection Rules (1997), but their enforcement has been largely ineffective. While laws and mechanisms are in place to mitigate potential environmental harm, they are often ignored in practice by both developers and monitoring agencies.

The planned road through Tsum challenged Indigenous practices that ensure mutual flourishing by disregarding responsibilities for all beings present in the landscape. Without any effort to include the local population in the road planning process, villagers were reminded of complex histories of peripheralization they have long experienced as a community living in the Himalayan highlands. For them, full participation in decision-making processes affecting their territory was an important milestone in the project for self-determination and environmental justice.

Not long after the government engineers came to Tsum, community members began to mobilize for an alternative road alignment. People did not oppose the road as such; they still believed in the road as a path to the future that was supposed to bring wealth and prosperity. But they argued for a culturally sensitive road construction that respects Indigenous practices of caring for the land in a fragile mountain environment.

Activist efforts first centered upon Kathmandu. Following a meeting with conservation specialists from the Manaslu Conservation Area Project (MCAP), people organized a workshop in the capital. The workshop fostered a critical dialogue between local leaders and knowledge holders, environmental organizations, and development practitioners in order to achieve a solution for road building based on local participation. Following the recommendations that emerged from the workshop, people formed the Tsum Conservation and Development Committee (TCDC), a local nonprofit organization focusing on the protection of important landmarks and monuments storying local history. In turn, the TCDC prepared a document listing potential environmental harms and endangered ancestral sites. This document was then presented to Chhabiraj Pant, Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport, and Ram Kumar Shrestha, Minister for Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation. A delegation also went to other national-level government offices, including the Department of Roads, the Department of Archeology, and the Ministry of Forests and Environment.

More publicly oriented, Sonam Lama co-directed a documentary film that portrayed the debate over the planned road, drawing on interviews with local community members. Titled *Mani: The Hidden Valley of Happiness at a Crossroads,* the film was screened at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival and in several villages in Tsum, as well as in the United States [Fig. 2]. Sonam also wrote articles in the *Nepali Times*, an English-language newspaper, which addressed the haphazard realities of development programs in Tsum.[9] However, the various efforts toward a self-determined and ecologically sustainable road construction met with little success. As has been observed elsewhere in Nepal, the road was driven by political agendas, as well as by the greed of construction firms and petty contractors wanting to make profit from large government budgets.

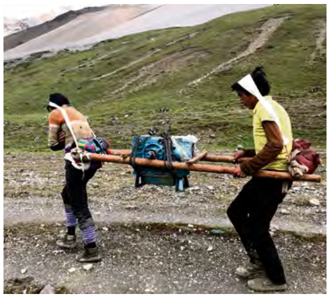

Fig. 3: Men carrying a new motor for the excavator across the mountain pass from China. (Photograph by Nadine Plachta, 2019)

When on a cloudy day in September 2013 an excavator was airlifted to Tsum, people decided to take matters into their own hands. Each time the heavy construction machine reached a village boundary, people gathered and, following intense debates, settled on the direction of the road. They bribed the single young Nepali man from the lowlands driving the excavator who, outnumbered, succumbed to their demands. In fear of attacks to his machine, the driver slept in the excavator for months. Still, he would sometimes wake to a cracked windshield or sugar in the tank (which supposedly clogs the fuel lines and disables the machine). The road successfully diverted from its original direction, but without the proper engineering knowledge, the excavator came dangerously close to the base of a steep cliff. Failure to stabilize the slope for protection triggered rockfall and – when a young village boy walking on the freshly dug road was injured – sparked discussions about whether the balance in the relationships between humans and the animated landscape was being upset.

Over the following years, progress on the road was slow and hampered by many obstacles. Because the area is not situated in the rain shadow of a mountain range, which is responsible for dry and arid zones in other nearby Himalayan regions such as Manang, Mustang, and Dolpo, summers in Tsum are moist and green. Persistent rainfall turns the ground muddy, leaving most of the road building to spring and autumn. In addition, the excavator itself showed signs of mechanical wear due to abrasion, corrosion, and damage. When the heavy machine broke down and needed to get repaired, spare parts were difficult to source [Fig. 3]. Regular fuel shortages, too, caused the machine to be parked and covered with a tarp for weeks at a time. In 2017, four years after construction on the road had started, the excavator reached an active landslide area behind Nile, the last village of the valley on the way to the Chinese border. It took another two years, until 2019, for it to navigate over the difficult terrain, and construction has stalled since.

Initially delayed by the geography and climate of the Himalayan highlands, the status of the road in Tsum was also affected by government priorities and changing political leadership. Firms and contractors are closely linked to politicians and bureaucrats, making road construction a complicated affair that frequently blurs the boundaries between public and private, legality and illegality.[10] Once envisioned as a transit corridor, the Tsum road was eventually suspended in favor of another, more promising highway through the neighboring valley of Nubri, where the government sought help from the army to expedite construction. Today, nearly ten years after the excavator first landed in Tsum, the distance covered by the dirt road takes people no longer than six hours to walk and even less on horseback. No vehicles or motorcycles are driving on the road in Tsum, and sections of it are now overgrown with bushes and strewn with rocks.

Conclusion

In Nepal, infrastructure programs are an emblem of national progress and resource wealth, but they also organize inequality. Similar to other development projects across the country, the planned road in Tsum emerged as a site of struggle over the representation of Indigenous Peoples. The road was designed and initiated without free, prior, and informed local consent, and the lack of legally recognized mechanisms for dispute resolution left the community with limited options to defend their rights.

Yet the condition of infrastructural suspension, fostered stronger human relationships with one another and the land in Tsum. The renewed sense of community that came through shared efforts to resist ongoing practices of capitalism and resource extraction enabled people to work for the legal protection of ancestral sites and the continuation of sustainable relations with the natural world – a sense of kinship – that was central to the defiance of the road.

In 2022, when countrywide local-level elections were held under Nepal's evolving federal system, people voted for a predominantly Indigenous-led local government in the Manaslu Conservation Area. One year into its tenure, this local body adopted a new law that formally protects Tsum's Indigenous knowledge systems and customary traditions of environmental management. The Shagya Act, as well as another law recognizing the community's traditional healing practices (the Amchi Act), requires the informed consent of the local population prior to the approval of federal projects that would affect land, water, culture, and livelihood. This presents an important step in strengthening self-determined development planning and designing more sustainable and sovereign futures for Indigenous Peoples in Tsum, as well as in Nepal more broadly.

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8 In Tsum, *gompa* (དགོན་པ) refers to both a village temple and a local monastery or nunnery. While *kani* (ཀ་ཎི་) are gates standing at the entrance to villages, *chorten* (མཆོད་རྟེན) and *mani* (མ་ཎི་རྡོ་འབུམ) walls are monuments that represent local ontologies and are found in and outside of settlements.

9 Sonam Lama, "Road From Nowhere to Nowhere," *Nepali Times* 663 (2013): 16–17.

10 Phurwa Gurung, "Challenging Infrastructural Orthodoxies: Political and Economic Geographies of a Himalayan Road," *Geoforum* 120 (2021): 103–112, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.01.020.

Chimerical Emancipation

The Road to a Better Future in Nepal

Florent Grazide

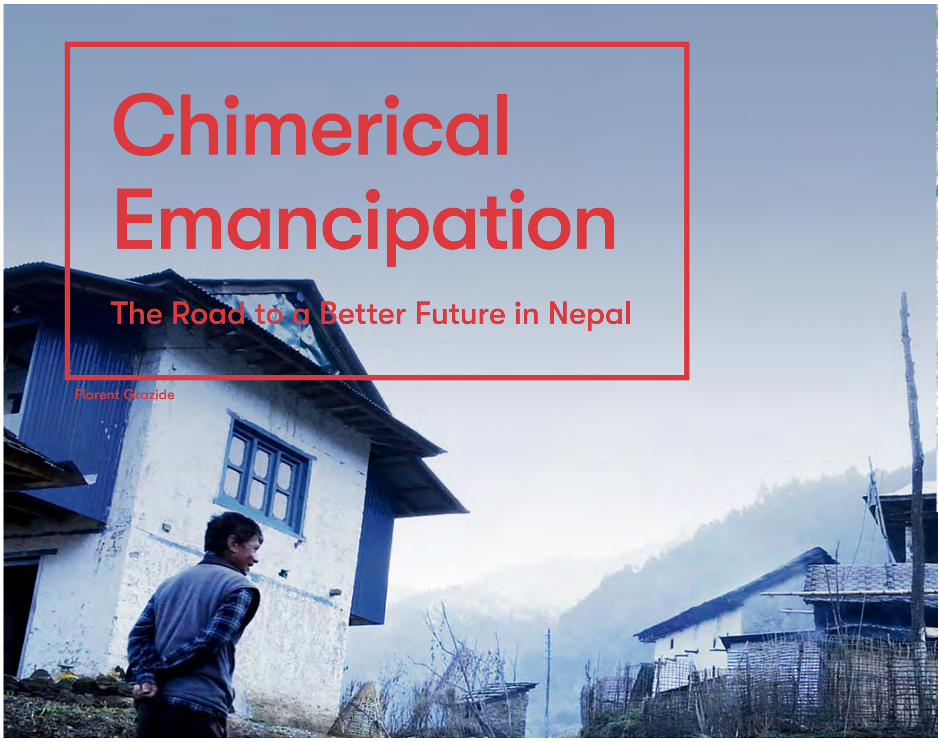

Fig. 1 (above): Man walking in Chhiwa village. (Photo by Florent Grazide, 2020)

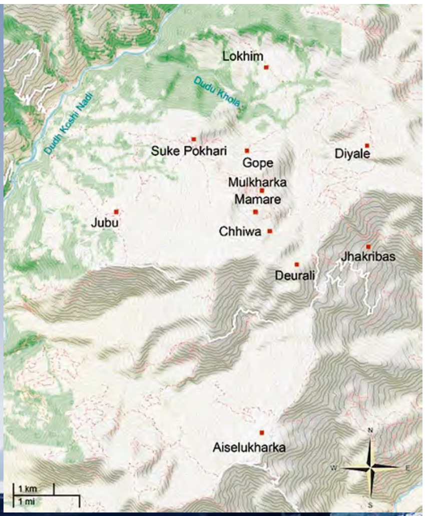

Fig. 2 (inset): Location of Chhiwa and surrounding area. (Source: Open Street Map, adapted by Florent Grazide)

The last decade has seen many significant political changes in Nepal. These came with promises of better lives and infrastructural and industrial development. But in Solukhumbu district, the inhabitants of a small Tamang village are still waiting for the roads to be built. Overcoming a feeling of powerlessness, they have decided to take matters into their own hands. By presenting one of their own in local elections, they decided to help shape a new horizon. These developments reveal how much infrastructure projects are embedded in local politics and the historical context of place.

Paths of yesteryear, roads of today

Before the road was built in Chhiwa,[1] in the south of the Solukhumbu district, the Tamang[2] inhabitants used the same paths their ancestors used before them, paths leading to the various bazaars (markets) in the area [Fig. 1]. To the west is the Lokhim market, and to the southeast, over the Deurali ridge that follows the border with Khotang district, is the path to Gope, Mulkharka, and Sukhe Pokhari [Fig. 2]. Twenty-five years ago, these roads were the main arteries of economic and social life. The incessant walking that characterised the daily life of the Nepalese working classes was part of the Nepalese ethos and can be found in a large number of ancient and contemporary songs and poems. Indeed, many well-known Nepali poems express a relationship with movement, such as Bhupi Sherchan's *Asāra* (असार, "June"), written in the 1950s, which evokes the return to the village of those who have migrated to work. In the poem, rhymes, assonance, and onomatopoeia make palpable this link between the labouring body and the natural world through which men move. Nowadays, this "on foot" way of life is changing due to the rise of infrastructure development projects. Since 2017, the government has conferred a large degree of autonomy on rural municipalities, giving villages unprecedented power to launch projects. Federalism has given ward chairmen new tools, which they are gradually putting to use.

Once elected, the Rai[3] ward chairman of Lokhim embarked on several projects, including the construction of several kilometres of roads, combining the municipality's funds with a request for financing from the Koshi Province. After assessing the needs of his people, he ordered the creation of a road connecting Chhiwa to the Deurali ridge, accessible by motorised transport from other towns. The aim of the project was, firstly, to reduce the daily suffering of local residents who regularly walk all day to carry out their tasks, and secondly, to enable the development of new livelihoods.

One day, a friend and assistant of mine in Chhiwa introduced me to his eighty-year-old uncle (आस्याङ, *āsyāng*) named Harka [Fig. 3], who started telling me a story about an infamous former local despot. It is the story of a kitchenware merchant (भाँडा, *bhā̃ḍā*) who came from Bhojpur district to marry a local woman, and who got elected head of the village assembly in 1976 and reigned over a village complex called Bakachol (Chhiwa, Mamare, Gope, Jhakri Bas, etc.) until 2006.[4] This man profited handsomely from the free labour of the surrounding Tamang for many years, in what appears to be a form of serfdom in Nepal's pseudo-democratic *Pañchāyat* (पंचायत, "village assembly") era (1961-1990). When people came up from the valley over the ridge to the bazaars, they were repeatedly asked for free services in threatening ways. In return, the "kitchenware merchant" (as people continued to call him) was supposed to feed them, which he failed to do.

This situation lasted 33 years, as Harka recalled it, and was a fairly common form of forced labour that often consisted of porterage in exchange for *rakam* (रकम, "land tenure rights").[5] However, all forms of land tenure rights had been officially banned in 1963. The old man continued: "All the Tamang, those from Chhiwa, Mamare, Jhakri Bas, worked for him. How did he use them? They did not agree at first when he asked them to work for free, but when he conquered the position of head of the village assembly, he started discriminating against all the Tamang [...]. He would say to all the people from Bagur, Mamare, Chhiwa, etc., 'If you bring me stuff from Aiselukharka, I will make you tea and cook good food for you.' But oh oh oh... the tea was never ready and he would say, 'Oh next time, sorry, I didn't have time.' I used to go to his house too and we were afraid of him..."

In his retelling of these events, Harka conveyed his frustration with the situation. While the head of the village assembly was also doing some good for the community, he was obviously exploiting people with impunity: "He was very rich, looked very rich. One day, on a Saturday, I was going to the bazaar with my bag to buy some things and I came across several Tamang from Mamare, Chhiwa, and Bagur who were bringing back some things for him. I asked them, 'Why do you still agree to work for the kitchenware merchant?' They said, 'If we don't work for him, we are not allowed to take the path to the ridge, he will kill us, what can we do?'"

This story exemplifies how much the history of the path linking Chhiwa to various economic centres and bazaars is embedded in past power relations. Today, for the villagers, its transformation into a road suitable for motorised vehicles is important not just economically but also socially and symbolically.

Fig. 3: *Portrait of Harka*, Adrien Vivière, digital drawing, 8.25 x 8.25 inches, 2023, Bordeaux (France). (Image courtesy of Adrien Vivière)

Election promises and disappointments

In the local elections of 2017, a young Rai Maoist, a man named Bhupal, was elected ward chairman of Lokhim. His constituency was made up of numerous village units that were far apart and did not all have the same services. His stated aim was to improve the lives of all his constituents. A year and a half later, in the winter of 2019, as his Tamang opponent was gaining traction among Chhiwa's inhabitants, he decided to start the construction of a road. He could see that the residents wanted rapid improvements following elections that had not been held for years. This new road would connect Chhiwa to the ridge for easier access to the town of Aiselukharka, another municipality where the inhabitants of Chhiwa go to buy food and petrol, among other supplies, or to go to the hospital.

As the full moon and the preparation for ancestor of the house rituals (दिमनि लाह पूजा, *dimni lāh pujā*) approached, people conversed while sitting on their front porches. Conversations about the upcoming construction of the road and the chairman's actions were on everyone's lips. More than a political visionary, the new young ward chairman became a road project manager, the paragon of development. Election often resets residents' expectations and hopes for "development" (विकास, *vikās*) that never happens. Supporters of the opposing camps, represented by the Unified Marxist Leninist party (UML) and Nepali Congress (NC) candidates, seized every opportunity to discredit the chairman's policies.

Chhiwa's inhabitants are for the most part *svatantra* (स्वतन्त्र, "free from any political affiliation"). They often say politicians in general are not to be trusted and are mere opportunists (अवसरवादी, *avasaravādī*). Yet, they have a different view of the Tamang candidate, Sun Kumar Tamang, for whom they voted in large numbers. A social worker in his forties who lives in the neighbouring town of Gope (where people support the road construction project), he became the unaffiliated candidate with almost no financial resources, and he and his constituents remained cautious about allegiances.

The construction of the road, an infrastructure project commissioned by the Maoist ward chairman, generated a complex set of reactions among the villagers. At first, they were enthusiastic about the idea of change, and the Maoist party was well-liked in the village. Then broken promises started feeding growing suspicion and discontent. Aware of the lack of support for his candidacy from the people of Chhiwa during the last election and hoping to increase the villagers' participation (सहभागि, *sahabhāgī*) in political life, the chairman delegated part of the project management to the villagers. Several young people joined a "road committee" and became responsible for project monitoring. Villagers expressed their concerns about the conditions of their involvement, however – NGOs and public authorities have made a habit of requesting free collective work from the beneficiaries of development projects when such projects should promote employment opportunities instead. And unlike in the past, they also expressed their desire to influence the way work was carried out, although the engineers still had the final say.

In early 2020, bulldozers started to dig what was to become the road from Chhiwa to the Deurali ridge. The road, a symbol of present and future wealth, generated fantasies and desires as soon as work began, exemplary of a kind of "infrastructural fetishism."[6] The work began awkwardly without anyone knowing who was doing what. Surveyors, civil servants, bulldozer drivers, and officials all came and went to and from the site. Soon, the opacity and lack of transparency (पारदर्शिता, *pāradarśitā*) that characterises this kind of project created tensions and generated rumours. Some were accused of corruption (भ्रष्टाचार, *bhraṣṭācāra*), which is present throughout the country, though generally invoked by those who feel wronged. Authorities could not guarantee the road's completion, and construction slowed to a halt during the Covid pandemic. At the time, conversations on Facebook provided fertile ground for investigation into inhabitants' sentiments. The ward chairman, himself very active on social media, started receiving negative comments from various residents: "Bhupal has sabotaged himself in five years! Even if Bhupal wins again, nothing will happen! What has he done for Lokhim in the last few years? The people of Lokhim must understand. Politics is service [to the people], not selfishness!"[7]

Sensing the lack of local support, Bhupal left the Maoist Party to join the UML and run for a different position in the next election. Sun Kumar, a Tamang social worker, ended up as the new Maoist Party candidate for the Ward No. 9 Lokhim elections in December 2021. The road was not yet bringing the "development" for which the people had hoped, and the outgoing ward chairman's uneven record awakened distrust and generated slander. Six months later (in May 2022), Sun Kumar was finally elected. Some Chhiwa residents were on the electoral list, so they became his assistants and took over the construction of the road [Fig. 4].

A horizon of opportunity and the melancholy of return

Between the old story of the kitchenware merchant despot and the recent election of a Tamang candidate, we can see signs of a slow evolution in the integration of the Tamang into the representative bodies of political power, and ultimately a change in class relations. In this region, the dominant class historically has long been that of the Newar merchants. Today, the Kirat populations, and particularly the Rai, are involved in ethnic movements that actively contribute to reshaping inter-ethnic power relations. The Tamang minority, for their part, are still struggling to find their place.

While this evolution is slow-paced, the inhabitants of Chhiwa remain convinced that a road would improve their daily lives. The anthropologist Dimitri Dalakoglou writes that "the majority of people understand how infrastructures are foundational systems of reference for the entire society,"[8] but what road construction actually helps create is often implicit and left to interpretation. In Chhiwa, social relations are part of a coherent social and symbolic system in which sharing is the rule and individualistic impulses without redistribution are frowned upon. The prospect of a motorable road reinforces the ideology of progress and generates desires, imaginaries, and fantasies about a different life far from home. Many talk about leaving the village, an individual choice that makes it possible to seize potential economic opportunities.

Almost all young people in Chhiwa want to take the road in one direction or the other: to go north, where the Sherpas have made their fortune in the Everest region as porters or guides; or to go to Kathmandu, a city that represents wealth but where life is not always easier than in the village. With no straightforward path to follow when they leave the reassuring social sphere of the village, they often conform despite themselves to a pattern of social reproduction of marginality.

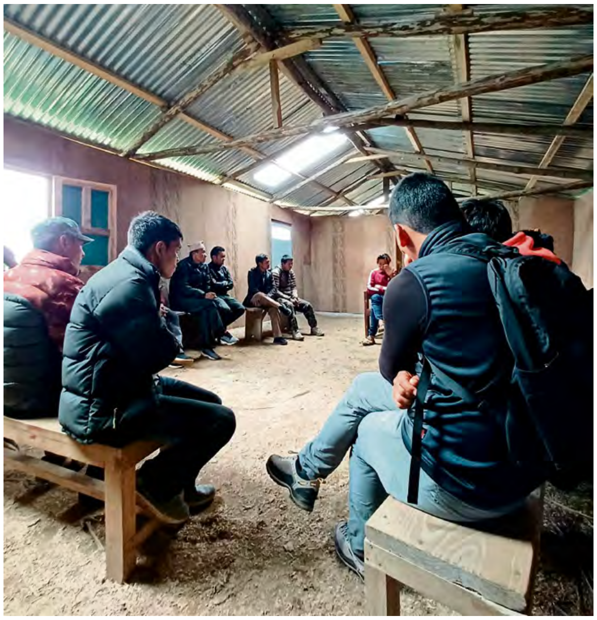

Fig. 5: Local meeting before the 2022 election. (Photo by Florent Grazide, 2021)

The road is a symbol of departure but also of return. Men build roads to get out of the village and travel to where they can generate income. The young people of Chhiwa have taken the opportunity offered by the road to extract themselves from the village-level sphere of social relations and mutual obligations, but the social world to which this road has given them access also generates a "desire to return." For some who have been away for many years, a good road actually makes it possible to return to the village. As a young man from Chhiwa, now a resident of the Kapan district in northeast Kathmandu, told me: "As soon as the roads are good, I will return to Chhiwa [to live]." For those who have been living in Kathmandu or elsewhere for years, returning to the village when they "have money" and the road is finished is a good idea. They are nostalgic for the return to their lost country.

As historian Rudolf Mrázek points out, "infrastructure creates a sense of modernity that passes through the body and mind, the sight of a long, straight, smooth road produces a sensory and political experience."[9] Many think of their return home as a straight and smooth one. But what kind of experience will they be bringing back with them? Once in Kathmandu, their experience of modernity is often confusing and disappointing. In Chhiwa, construction of roads takes time and money; it is a bumpy process of negotiation that needs to be continuously renewed and is not always successful. If it produces a kind of sensory, emotional, and political experience, it also often generates a sense of disillusionment and powerlessness. This experience does not give politics a revolutionary aura for the young villagers to whom I spoke, nor does it determine ideologies or political labels. In fact, through this experience, they come to realise the value of kinship ties and social relations back in the village. Distrustful of party politics, they vote for people they know well and trust.

Conclusion

By definition, the horizon is a line where the earth and sky meet at the edge of the visual field, and it is always pushed back as the viewer moves forward, never attainable. In political language, the horizon designates a desirable future to be built together. Political party leaders in Nepal often use this imagery to explain their political programs. The inhabitants, however, sensing that the politicians' promises will be difficult to keep, are now saying that they vote "more for the person (ब्याक्ति, *byākti*) than for the Party."

The construction of the road in Chhiwa is embedded in a local history of relations and does not modify the deep social structures that underpin Tamang relationships with the rest of Nepalese society. The political evolution and the increased power conferred on the rural municipalities were, however, crucial to the development of infrastructural projects. As anthropologist Ben Campbell argued a decade ago, "it is an old rhetoric of modernisation that thinks a rural and ethnically marginal population can be brought into modern economic ways and opportunities through simply providing infrastructural connection."[10] The building of a road contributes to the construction of the political subject in several ways. In the particular social situation of road construction, a series of social phenomena and conflicts are at play which reinforce the subject's awareness of being marginalised and distant from circles of power. The social order of a village like Chhiwa, which does not attract a lot of tourists, is rarely shaken up and old class and hierarchical relationships persist.

What the poorly completed road construction project produces in this small Tamang village is a feeling of "stagnation." Generally speaking, the decentralisation of federalism and the hyper-centralisation of political parties has not promoted the advent of "tribal" (जनजाति, *janajātī*) representatives in power.[11] The people of Chhiwa have partly solved this problem by nominating and then electing "one of their own" to the position of ward chairman in 2022. But when that happens, what difference does it make? This victory did not prevent more villagers from leaving for other horizons. Movement is still the best way to fight stagnation, and perhaps that is why young people, faced with so many difficulties, leave the village, abandoning local politics while at the same time reinforcing the idea of a liberating mobility.

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Notes

1 Chhiwa is inhabited by about 350 people, the vast majority of whom are Tamang. According to the new administrative division of Nepal in 2015, it now forms a quarter of ward no 9 Lokhim, which is part of the Thulung Dudhkoshi rural municipality, chiefly inhabited by Rai.

2 The Tamang population numbers around 1.639 million and is one of the largest Indigenous groups in Nepal. They are Buddhists and speak a Tibeto-Burman language. For a long time, they were confused with Tibetans by the Nepali administration. During the 19th century, they were also known as *māsinē matavālī* (मासिने मतवाली), which means "enslaved alcohol drinkers." This term refers to a category of people in the Muluk Ain legal code and to the "impure consumption" that characterised them, like other Indigenous peoples of Nepal. See Andras Höfer, *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal: A Study of the Muluk Ain of 1854* (Lalitpur: Himal Books, 2004). Even today, the Tamang have difficulty integrating into the circles of power (occupied by the Bahun-Chetri-Newar caste trio) and are fighting to preserve their identity and language.

3 Rai are one of the Indigenous groups of Nepal. They belong to the Kirant people (along with the Limbu). Kirant designates ethnic groups mainly located in the mountains of East Nepal but also numerous in Sikkim and Darjeeling. They speak a Tibeto-Burman language and follow their own religion.

4 The old man, Harka, refers to "Bakajol" as a territory in which Chhiwa was included before 1976. Subsequently, Chhiwa was attached to Lokhim VDC (Solu) in 1990 and Jakhri Bas to Bakajol VDC (Khotang). Today, these localities are neither in the same district nor in the same rural municipality, although their inhabitants have strong kinship links.

5 For example, see David Holmberg, Kathryn March, and Suryaman Tamang, "Local Production/Local Knowledge: Forced Labor from Below," *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 4, no. 1 (January 1999): 5 64. In 1963, legislation was enacted to abolish the *rakam* system in its entirety, see Mahesh C. Regmi, *Landownership in Nepal* (Delhi: Adroit Publishers, 1999), 169.

6 About "infrastructural fetishism" see Dimitri Dalakoglou, "The Road: An Ethnography of the Albanian–Greek Cross-Border Motorway," *American Ethnologist* 37: 132 149;; and Morten A. Pedersen, *Not Quite Shamans: Spirit Worlds and Political Lives in Northern Mongolia* (London, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

7 Facebook post written by Lokhim resident to the ward chairman (April 2021).

8 Dimitri Dalakoglou, "The Road from Capitalism to Capitalism: Infrastructures of (Post) Socialism in Albania," *Mobilities* 7, no. 4 (2012): 584.

9 Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 8..

10 Ben Campbell, "Rhetorical Routes for development: A road project in Nepal," *Contemporary South Asia* 18, no. 3 (2010): 276.

11 As Professor Krishna Hachhettu noted in his talk entitled "Federal Nepal at its Formative Phase" (Federalism Conference, EHESS, Campus Condorcet, Paris, France, 24 May 2022).

New Road, New Rules

Modernized Road and Certified Mobility

John Smith

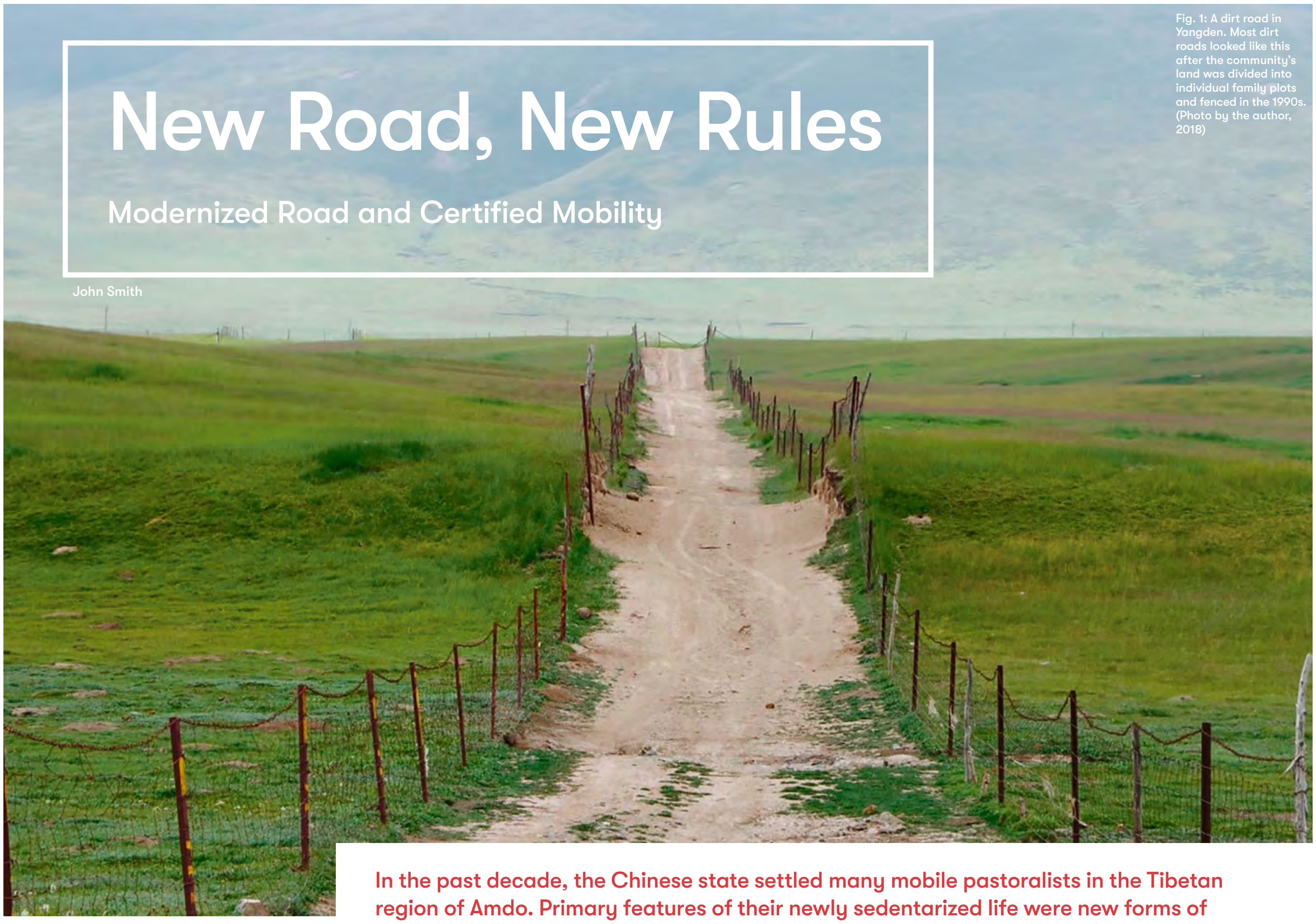

Fig. 1: A dirt road in Yangden. Most dirt roads looked like this after the community's land was divided into individual family plots and fenced in the 1990s. (Photo by the author, 2018)

In the past decade, the Chinese state settled many mobile pastoralists in the Tibetan region of Amdo. Primary features of their newly sedentarized life were new forms of housing and new forms of mobility. For some pastoralists, mobility now entails driving on a newly built road that replaced a rough, bumpy dirt road. Despite the smoothness of a glimmering concrete road, the road has proven more complicated to use for drivers than the previous road because it requires something that is very difficult to access: a government-issued driver's license.

Modern road and more requirements

The Tibetan yak and sheep herding community of Yangden, where I conducted fieldwork in 2021, is located on a vast grassland surrounded by mountain ranges at about 4000 meters above sea level on the eastern Tibetan Plateau in Amdo, Qinghai Province (People's Republic of China). It is connected to the vibrant Galkar Town, located at the bottom of a valley and reachable by a 50-kilometer-long road.

"What is the point of having this shiny road if I am not allowed to drive on it?" Tsering said in frustration as we waited for the night to come so he could drive his car from Galkar to Yangden.[1] Tsering knew police were stopping every car on the road that day, asking drivers to show driver's licenses and insurance papers. Consequently, we waited until around 7:00 PM when the police left. Tsering was a 45-year-old father of three children. He was a good driver who had been driving between Galkar and Yangden without a license for decades, as documents were not previously required and transportation regulations were less restrictive. In 2007, for example, Tsering drove his family to the famous Labrang Monastery on pilgrimage without any problems. Every year between 2005 and 2008, he also often drove to Golog during the caterpillar fungus season. But that was before the tightened road regulations and requirements for driver's licenses and insurance registrations. The contemporary situation includes surveillance cameras, police checkpoints, and new driving rules. The only way Tsering and many other drivers could cope was to drive at night or at other times when surveillance was relaxed.

Before it became a concrete road, Yangden residents used this road to trade, embark on religious pilgrimages, and visit neighboring communities. Today, they depend on this road more than before to send children to schools, take ill community members to hospitals, and buy goods in Galkar Town markets. The government rebuilt this road in 2013 as part of a campaign to bring modern development to Yangden. Local nomads are pleased that the bumpy dirt route [Fig. 1] was transformed into a concrete road that made travel much more convenient [Fig. 2]. However, driving on this road is now inconvenient due to the government-certified license requirement. Ironically, therefore, the locals' excitement about this road is paired with a lack of easy access to actually use it.

Changing regimes of mobility

Galkar Town did not exist before 1953. The track between Yangden and contemporary Galkar was a broken, narrow path leading to a key local monastery – Changchub Ling. It also linked Yangden to the residence of a local Tibetan chief and several neighboring Tibetan farming villages at the base of the mountains. When the local chief administered the Yangden community, there were vibrant interactions between the nomadic community of Yangden at the top of the mountains and the neighboring farming villages located in the warmer valley bottoms more suited for farming. The track accommodated local trade between the farming villages and nomadic Yangden. Every autumn, men in Yangden families packed yaks and horses with sheep wool, meat, butter, and cheese and took them to farming villages to trade for barley, wheat flour, rapeseed oil, fruit, wooden milk buckets, and the like.

Locals called the trail between Yangden, Changchub Ling Monastery, and the farming villages a *kang lam* (Tib. རྐང་ལམ།, a "footpath" for walking and riding horses or yaks). The path came into being through repetitive use over generations. There were no signs along the path. The path itself disappeared in places and was again visible only in certain areas. But names of different parts of the trail were learned through experience and shared stories. Passing through rocky and forested mountain ranges and grassland, locals knew where to find the safest and most convenient areas to walk and ride. Part of the path was also a *kye lam* (Tib. སྐྱེལ་ལམ།), which refers to wider transportation paths Tibetan nomads used when they packed belongings on yaks and horses and moved to seasonal pastures.

In 1953, Galkar County Town was established as the local government seat not far from the chief's residence. In the era of the People's Communes (1953–1983), the old footpath linking the residence to Changchub Ling Monastery and Yangden was turned into a wider road for tractors and a few trucks known as the "liberation vehicle" (Ch. *jiefangche* 解放车) used for collecting wool, cheese, butter, animal skins, and more for the commune and transporting them from one place to another. The tractors were brought to Yangden for agriculture. During the People's Commune period in the 1970s, a large part of Yangden's wide grassland was plowed for farming. I talked to Yangden elders who were part of a local team assigned to build the road between Yangden and Galkar, which involved using hand-held shovels and occasionally explosives. Lhundrub said, "I can never forget this. Explosives were used to clear the roadway through the foot of Dram Mountain, which caused the death and injury of many frogs." Lhundrub chanted Om Mani Padme Hum, a Buddhist mantra, three times and then continued telling the story of making the road when he was about 21. "It took about three years to complete. Winter was too cold, and the earth was frozen, so we had to wait for spring to continue the work. We were afraid of digging the earth, especially where there were springs, boulders, and trees, without proper consultations with a local lama. But it was a time when we were told, 'There are no gods and no ghosts,' so we dug where we were told to do so."

In the late 1990s and 2000s, the road between Galkar Town and Yangden was used by a few locals traveling on foot and riding horses or bicycles, and a few driving tractor-trailers or motorbikes. During the late 1990s, a section of this road was known among the locals for its ghosts. This understanding was based on several tractor-trailer accidents at night. The drivers lost control and the vehicles tumbled down the narrow, zigzagging mountain road. One family lost their parents, and some others were seriously injured. Until about 2005, night driving on that road was not recommended. Rumors abounded of encountering frightening images and hearing cries while driving on the curved, steep part of the mountain road. Locals blamed ghosts as well as poor road conditions for accidents. Stories of ghosts on the road are no longer heard very often, however. No one is afraid of driving and encountering ghosts at night. Instead, they are afraid of driving in the daytime and being caught by the police for driving without proper licenses.

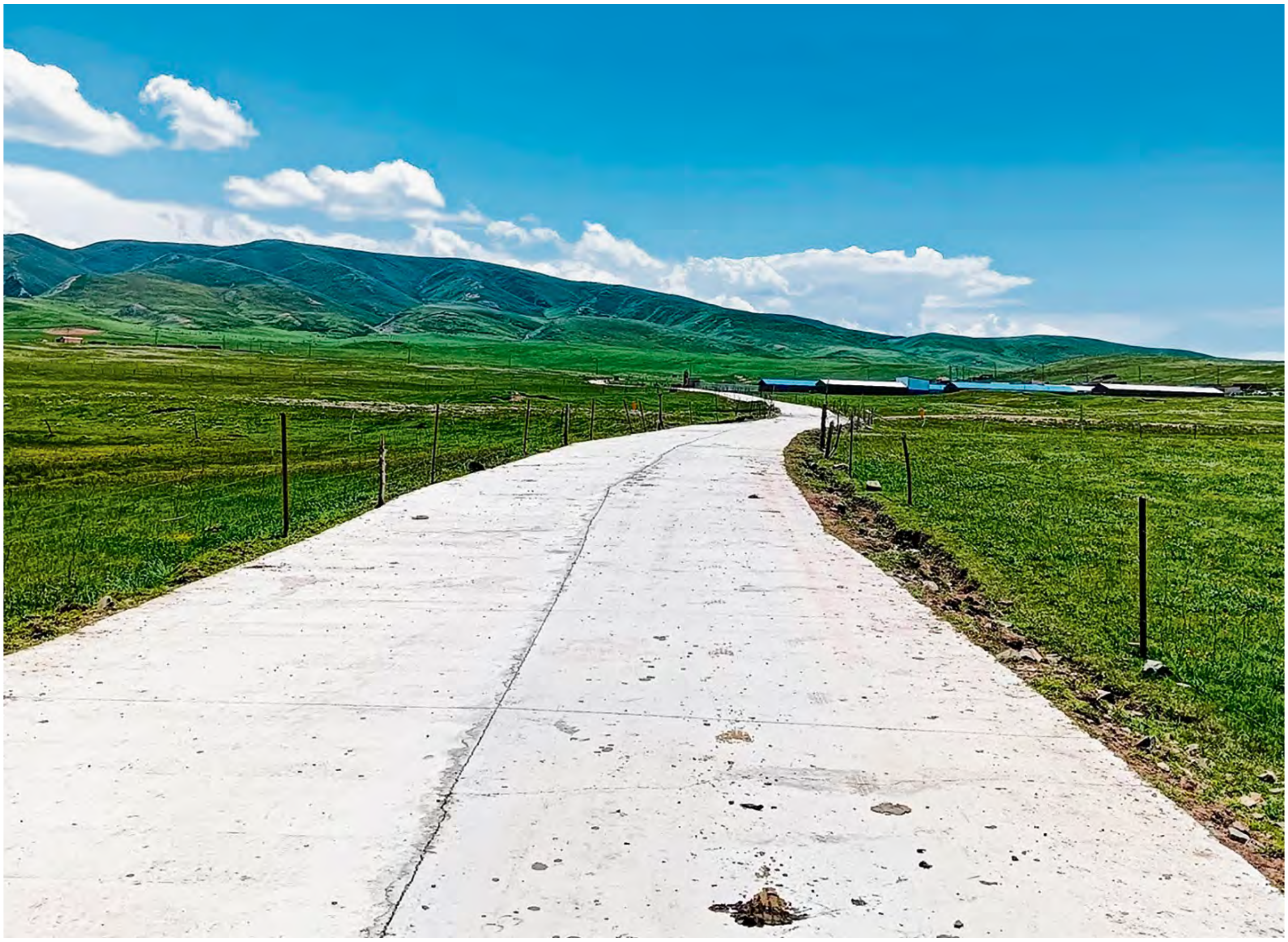

Fig. 2: Part of the new concrete road in Yangden. (Photo courtesy of Gur Gon, 2023)

As Yangden residents increasingly bought motorcycles in the mid-2000s, the number of pedestrians, bicycles, and horseback riders decreased. The number of tractors, which were popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s for transporting families' belongings from one pasture to another during seasonal movements, also gradually diminished after the community's land was divided into individual family plots and fenced. Around 2015, the dirt road between Galkar Town and Yangden that local Tibetans had built in the 1970s was turned into a shiny concrete road with the help of giant bulldozers, road rollers, and excavators. In 2018, a section of the road near Galkar Town became an asphalt road. Many locals were hired and paid to help build the road that became known as the *lang khor lam* (Tib. རླངས་འཁོར་ལམ།, "vehicle road").

Challenges of motorized life

Road construction was also linked to establishing a nomad settlement town in Yangden for approximately 400 herding households beginning in 2015 and continuing today. The number of vehicles has increased since the establishment of the new road and the community's changing lifestyle.

New road signs and billboards in Chinese and Tibetan were displayed along the road, welcoming and celebrating this modern development project. For about two years, car ownership in Yangden increased as locals enjoyed driving on the road. Locals' lives became more dependent on vehicles, especially for settled families who no longer herded livestock. Many families who relocated to the settlement town sold their livestock and used the money to buy vehicles. Many young people became truck drivers, transporting goods and construction materials, and unofficial taxi drivers. Most local car owners drive the China-manufactured Xiali, a five-person car, or Wuling, a mini pickup truck [Fig. 3]. Each vehicle costs about ¥50,000 ($7100 USD). According to the locals, these two types are appealing because they are more affordable and fuel-efficient than other vehicles. A popular phrase goes, "Xiali and Wuling only smell gasoline while other vehicles drink gasoline."

Driving rules and regulations enforced on the road between Yangden and Galkar Town now require that motor vehicles be certified and that their operation be properly learned from driving schools. For many herders, initial delight about road improvement turned to disappointment and concern. Document requirements have created new barriers for local drivers to legally access the road. Although the government mandates a driver's license, acquiring one is challenging. Passing the highly technical Chinese language exam (or the inadequately translated Tibetan exam) to qualify for a license is one barrier. For some, this entails living for months at certified driving boarding schools. For many, getting a driver's license is a prohibitive personal expense that takes years. It costs from ¥3500 to ¥10,000 ($491 to $1400 USD), depending on an individual's driving skills, location, knowledge, and time commitment. Most Yangden residents above age 35 cannot read and write well in Chinese, making passing driving tests more challenging.

I met Tsering in Galkar Town in the summer of 2021. Tsering's two children were enrolled at the County Town boarding school, and Tsering came to visit them on the weekend. When Tsering came to town, he had to get up and drive at 4:00 AM, when few were awake, to avoid the police because he was driving illegally without a driver's license. When we drove his Xiali car back to Yangden that night, Tsering told me he had been attending a driving school in Galkar whenever he had time. Two years had passed and he still had not received his driver's license. Although Tsering is an experienced driver and had been driving safely for decades, he had to relearn how to drive according to the standardized and prescribed driving rules.

For Tsering, like many others in Yangden, the most challenging barrier is passing the written test. He reads some Tibetan but knows no Chinese characters. He is unsure if he will ever be issued a license. Many locals never successfully pass their license requirements despite trying for years due to their lack of reading ability in Chinese or Tibetan. Tsering had heard of a few people his age who eventually received their licenses and was determined to continue trying.

A modern, shiny road seems promising to ensure safer and more accessible mobility. Tsering and many other drivers wanted it; however, its arrival has also brought new demands, such as learning legalized driving skills and acquiring licenses, which have decreased access to legal mobility. This raises larger questions of mobility on the Tibetan Plateau and in other areas. As more people are sedentarized through urbanization, mobility is increasingly dependent on motorized forms of transportation legalized through licensing. These transformations raise questions about the accessibility of roads and what might be done so that locals have worry-free access to motorized mobility.

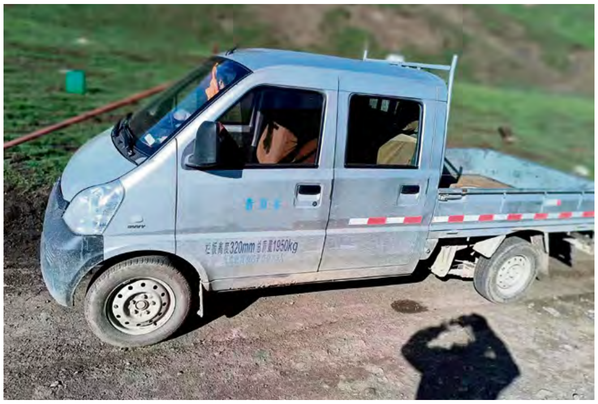

Fig. 3: A Wuling pickup truck in Yangden (Photo courtesy Gur Gon, 2023).

John Smith (a pseudonym) works in the field of anthropology, focusing on state intervention, mobility, and nomadic agency.

Notes

1 Names of the people and specific places in this article are pseudonyms for confidentiality. Tibetan scripts are provided for some important local Tibetan terms. Non-English terms are Tibetan ("Tib.") unless indicated as Chinese ("Ch.") and provided in Pinyin.

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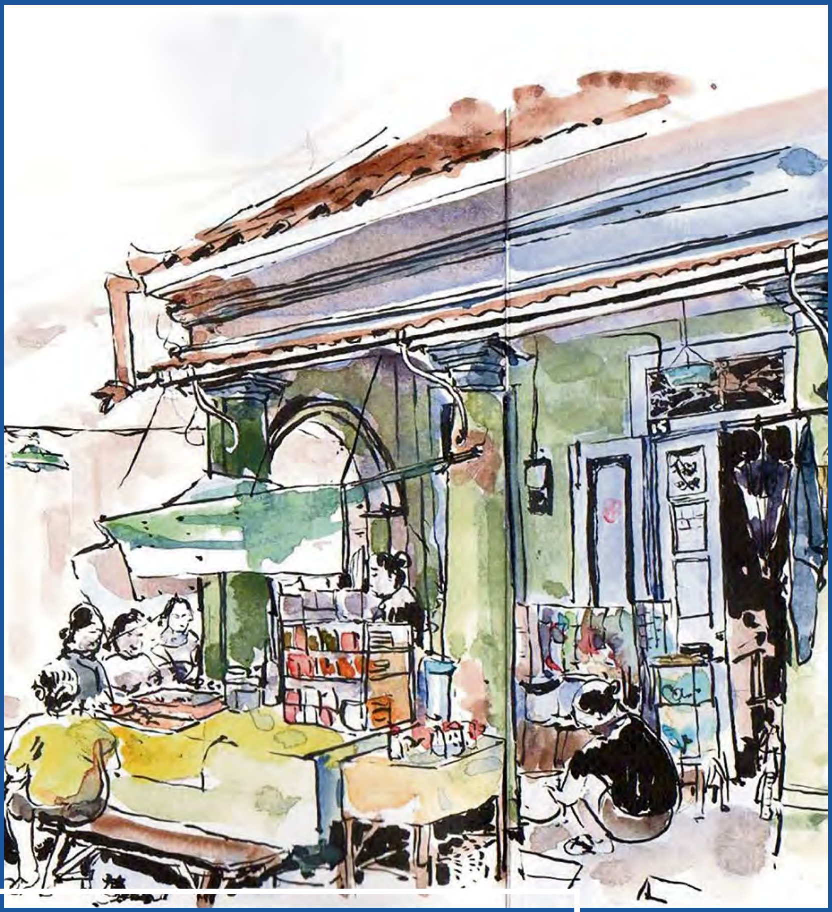
ICAS 13



Above: A local meeting place at a heritage house in Kampung Peneleh, Surabaya. (Sketch by Hongky Zein, Urban Sketchers Surabaya, 2019)

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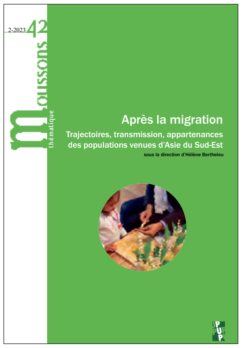
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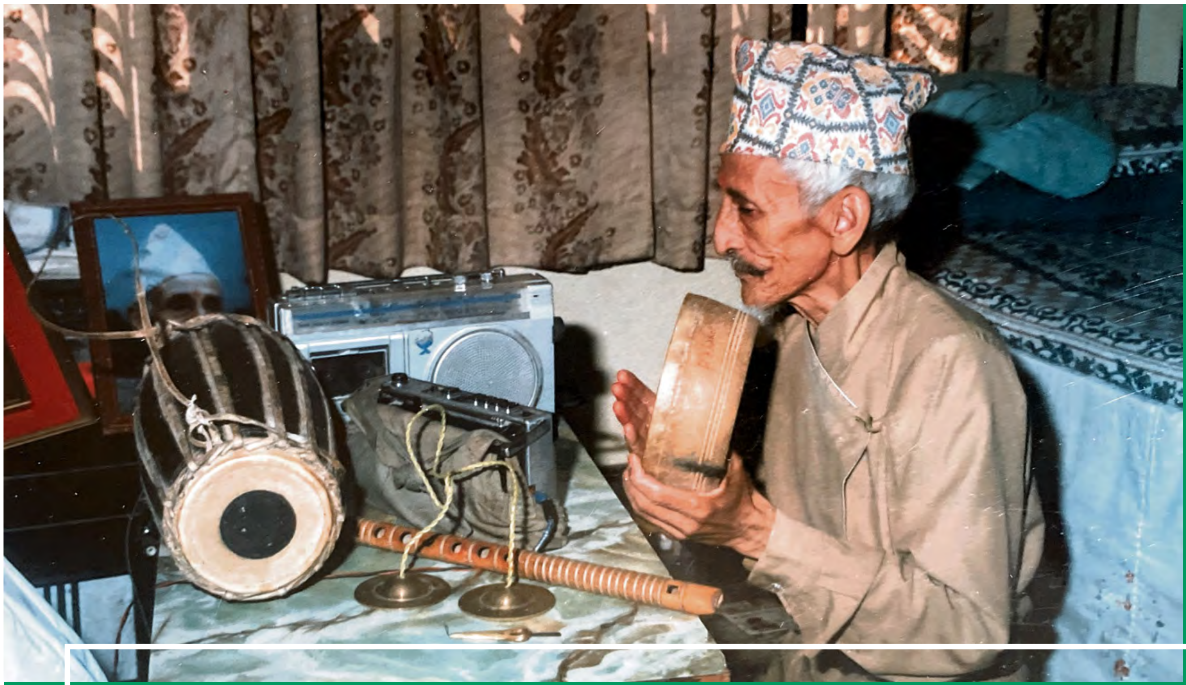

Fig. 1: Subi Shah recording the khaijadi part with two cassette recorders, surrounded by the other instruments. (Photo courtesy of Subi Shah, 2005).

Collaboratively Documenting and Revitalizing Traditional Performance in Nepal

Anna Stirr

The first time I went to Nepal, in the year 2000, I ended up hanging out at a record store. The owner Mangal Maharjan introduced me to a spry man in his seventies who taught music and dance at a local school, rode his bicycle back and forth to work every day, and used the room behind the store for private lessons.

This was Surendra Bikram “Subi” Shah, a nationally honored performer, educator, and retired Army colonel, who had made it his life’s work to develop, sustain, and promote the Nepali folk genres of music, dance, and drama that he had learned as a child and performed all his life. Having grown up in a semi-royal landowning family who were patrons of *pangdure* dance troupes and themselves performed in these same troupes, Subi was an expert on connections among music, song, dance, drama, ritual life, and the spiritual world. He had strong opinions and a wealth of knowledge about how to preserve and promote the culture he cared about, and was trying to leave a lasting legacy.

Subi Shah’s books describe genres intricately connected with local social life and religious practice in the performance tradition known as *pangdure* in Nepal’s central hills. As our team works on translating them into English for open access online publication – with accompanying musical transcriptions, audio and video recordings, and annotations – we reflect on their author’s legacy and the potential for our work to spark new interest and innovation in traditional music and dance.

“I have an album to release, but none of the companies want it,” Subi said, a few years later. It was a self-produced cassette of instrumental renderings of folk songs. Recorded in his own home using two cassette recorders, he had played all the parts himself [Fig. 1]. We had an idea: we would minimally edit the cassette recordings and release a demo CD, to help him convince the companies of interest in such recordings. We included his extensive liner notes in Nepali and in English translation, and this became the demo CD *Nepali Folk Music: One Man’s Endeavors.*[1] The demo CD worked, and Subi released a similar, professionally recorded album a few more years later: *One Man’s Endeavors.*[2]

We then turned to his writings. Subi’s best-known book, *Madal*, is a treatise on how to play this barrel drum used in many different Nepali performance genres. First published in 1983, it has taught many music students, including me, the basics of *madal* playing, music theory, and cultural background. “Maybe you could translate this too, along with my other books! I have some that aren’t even published yet!” Subi suggested.

Among his other published books were *Glimpses of Nepali Folk Song* and a textbook section introducing Nepali folk dances. Unpublished were an in-depth look at these dances with a dance notation of his own invention, *Dances of Central Nepal;* a book on tunes and his theories of melody, *Introduction to Nepali Tunes;* and a study of the *Sorati* dance-drama, including its full oral text, as performed in his home village of Jyamrung in Dhading district.

With detailed information about *pangdure* genres’ social importance and their connections to numinous beings of the sacred landscape, Subi Shah’s writings are the only scholarship on these genres that analyzes and provides concrete, interrelated examples of all aspects of performance. They are a treasure trove of information for scholars and performers alike.

Before we could start translating together, Subi Shah passed away in 2008. I slowly began to translate *Madal*. In 2021, I began working with a group of scholars, performers, and community members to translate the books and film performances. We approach our work with Subi’s holistic vision in mind, collaborating online, in Kathmandu, in Subi Shah’s village of Jyamrung, and in nearby Sohraghar in Dhading. Some glimpses from our research and recording process follow.

Songs, tunes, and memories

In *Introduction to Nepali Tunes*, Shah discusses the ragas played by the Naumati Baja ensemble, linked with rituals performed at different times of the day and night. These we recorded in July 2022, in Subi Shah’s home village in Jyamrung, with the Sankha Devi Jyamrung Darbar Naumati Panchai Baja ensemble, led by Ram Bahadur Sundas [Fig. 2]. Jyamrung’s Pangdure dance troupe used to perform in the same location, once the courtyard of the palace where Subi Shah was born. The troupe and the Jyamrung Darbar palace no longer exist, but the Naumati Baja is one of the most sought-after in the region.

There are also seasonal ragas like *asare*, performed in the monsoon rice-planting season. We decided to film a traditional scene of the Naumati Baja performing while planters work in the rice fields, rarely found today as tractors whose engines drown out instruments have replaced water buffalo in plowing [Fig. 3]. A hillside of rice fields owned by the Shah family, inaccessible to tractors, provided the perfect setting.

The performer Pitambar Sundas (playing *sahanai* in the *asare* video), who played all the instruments of the Naumati Baja ensemble and danced pangdure dances in his day, reminisced about folk songs and his time dancing with the Jyamrung troupe [Fig. 4]. He said, “With Subi Shah, it was really… After we performed at the National Dance Center, we visited government ministers’ homes. And we would play *deusi*, and dance *sorathi*. When we danced *sorathi*, he would dance the *maruni* part too. He danced all the parts. It was so much fun! The songs from long ago are beautiful. The songs from old customs… We shouldn’t forget our customs. I think it is very good that you’re looking for these good things from long ago. I hope these customs continue. Even if we die, the world will be able to hear them. Right? Others will get to hear them. And everyone will remember that these things happened… The world will get to see them! Right?”

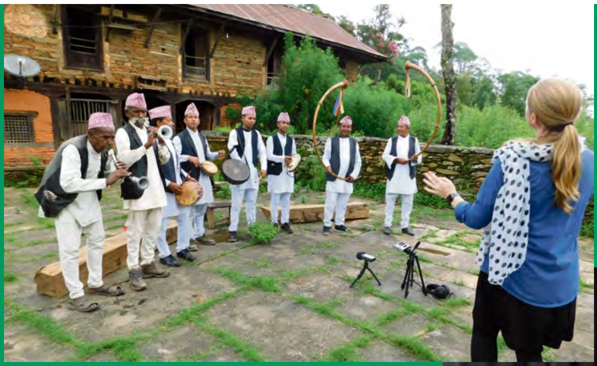

Fig. 2 (left): Recording Naumati Baja ragas in front of Jyamrung Darbar's old stables. (Photo by Mason Brown, 2022).

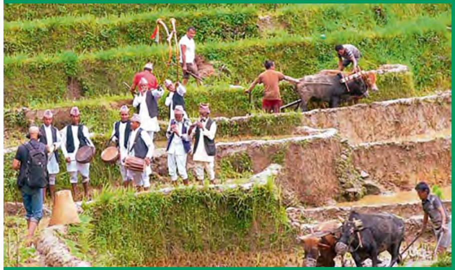

Fig. 3 (below left): Dr. Lochan Rijal and the Naumati Baja soundcheck for the recording of Asare rag. (Photo by Mason Brown, 2022).

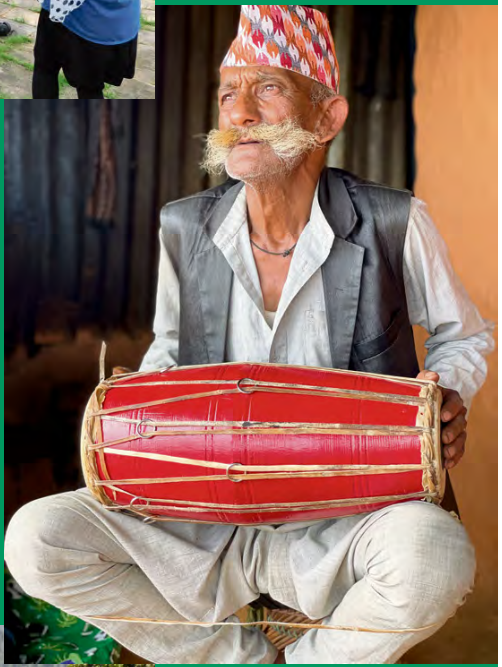

Fig. 4 (above): Pitambar Sundas, multi-instrumentalist and Pangdure dancer, at his home with a madal drum. (Photo by the author, 2023).

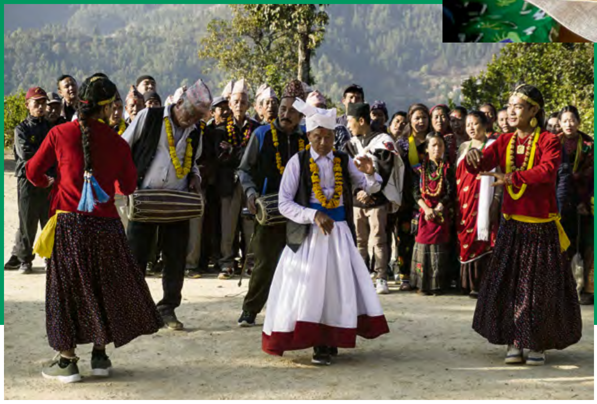

Fig. 5 (left): Krishna Charitra song and dance. (Photo by Dinesh Raj Upadhyaya, 2023).

List of resources

Note: *Music and Dances of Central Nepal: Subi Shah's Works on Pangdure (Maruni) Performance* is scheduled to be published with Open Book Publishers in fall 2024.

Video: Asare Ropai
https://youtu.be/Oz_9qrhduKo

Video: Pitambar Sundas Sorathi Songs
https://youtu.be/UiATHHazvhk
Caption: Pitambar Sundas sings songs from the Sorathi dance-drama, reminisces, and approves of our project.

Video: Calling Saraswati to Dance
https://youtu.be/4GSbWSVKpaE

Video: Krishna Charitra
https://youtu.be/zioPDqzsPSA

Team
Project Director Dr. Anna Stirr; Co-Project Director Dr. Mason Brown (musical transcriptions lead); Hikmat Khadka (2nd translator); Dr. Lochan Rijal, (audiovisual production lead; 3rd translator); community liaisons Rita Thapa Magar and Dhruva Shah (Subi Shah's son); production assistants Rajan Shrestha, Dinesh Raj Upadhyaya, and Pranim Thapa; Jyamrung performers Ram Bahadur Sundas, Pitambar Sundas and the Sankha Devi Jyamrung Darbar Naumati Panchai Baja; Sohraghar's Jalkanya Devi Yuva Club, and many more. This project is supported by a Scholarly Editions and Translations grant from the US National Endowment for the Humanities.

Pangdure dances and community

The term *pangdure* is most often used in central Nepal to describe a set of dance forms performed by multiethnic troupes. These include the *sorathi* and *Krishna charitra* dance-dramas, three standalone dance forms (*jhyaure, khyali,* and *chudka*), more local forms, and all of their music and lyrics. These names also denote rhythmic cycles and poetic meters, and knowing their interconnections helps make sense of folk song and dance categories throughout the Himalayan foothills. *Pangdure* is also known as *maruni*, after the name of the female role type. The roles include the *pursunge* or lead dancer, the *madale* dancers who dance with *madals* around their waists, and the female or female-dressed *maruni* dancers. Originally, all dancers were male; while there are now many female *maruni* dancers, men dancing the female role type remains common. The troupe we worked with in Sohraghar, Dhading, had all male dancers. They were delighted to have an occasion to perform, and they trained for a month before filming. The gurus welcomed the chance to teach new dancers, and the new dancers welcomed the chance to learn. The *maruni* dancers in these photos and videos are the newly minted members of this dance troupe.

Pangdure dances are preceded by rituals that sacralize the space and time for dancing, and "bind" the performing troupe together with the blessings of the local deities and the Hindu goddess of music, Saraswati. Troupe members embody these blessings – and, sometimes, the goddess herself – through participating in song and drum sequences that can lead to possession by Saraswati, and eventually through consuming the blessed ritual offerings, *prasad*.

Possession by Saraswati at such an event is a positive thing, but it still contains an element of danger: if the person possessed is not released skillfully, they may become sick. The invocatory rhythm, called *thakan* or *thokan*, creates the sacred space for performance and is also used to release people from possession. The *thakan* is first played on the *madal*, followed by a song invoking multiple deities near and far, called *garra bandhne*, meaning "troupe-binding." When this song is finished, the *thakan* is played again, repeated as needed to release people from possession. This all requires considerable skill in drumming.

Calling Saraswati to Dance depicts the ritual sequence as performed in Sohraghar in January 2023 at the home of our team member Rita Thapa Magar, with the support of her entire village. The video shows the multisensory offerings, the songs of worship, and the drum sequences that call Saraswati to the performance space. When Rita's brother Anand became possessed and the *madal* strap broke, everyone was tense: could the drummers successfully release him from possession and carry on with the day's performances?

Once Anand was successfully released from possession and the tense moment had passed, we moved to a field for dancing. Fig. 5 provides a glimpse of one *Krishna charitra* song and dance – a vibrant performance with lyrics about the life of the god Krishna.

We continually ask ourselves: How can our work best be a resource for scholars and communities who want to maintain and innovate on their holistic performance practices? For some of us, these research areas are home. These team members see our work as a potential jumping-off point for a variety of future projects, and as a way to emphasize the performance genres' value in and beyond their communities.

The community members on our research team emphasize the importance of making performance inclusive and enjoyable. Rita Thapa Magar says, "you have to get the whole village involved," which indeed she did for our days in Sohraghar, and which she often does for her own folk music videos. Dhruva Shah, the son of Subi Shah, became an Olympic riflery coach rather than a performer, and he remembers his father's strong opinions: "He kept saying that it had to be done this way, it couldn't be done that way, and I wanted to do new, modern things when I was young, so I didn't learn music." He offers, "If young people see it as ossified or waning, not valued, and therefore not worth continuing, they are less likely to join in." Ram Bahadur Sundas hopes to find more recordings of his family members in national and private archives, make them available to the ensemble to remember their forebears, and keep learning from them.

What started with Subi Shah's desire to preserve his traditions, and my desire to share his works with a broader audience, has gained multiple meanings to different participants, and the end goal of producing a multimedia publication keeps us working together to support these varied performance traditions in multiple ways. We look forward to seeing what the future holds.

Anna Stirr is Associate Professor of Asian Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Email: stirr@hawaii.edu

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Notes

1 *Nepali Folk Music: One Man's Endeavors* (EMW 2005) on SoundCloud: https://soundcloud.com/subi-shah-948138109

2 *One Man's Endeavors* (Music Nepal 2008) on SoundCloud: https://soundcloud.com/subishah

Communicating Beyond Borders

IIAS' Global Network Visualised

Thomas Voorter

For an internationally operating network organisation and knowledge broker like IIAS, it is essential to monitor the effectiveness of its operations and to understand the interests and geographical distribution of its audiences. Despite frequent face-to-face engagements at conferences and other international gatherings, insights from our mailing list subscribers and online metrics offer a comprehensive understanding of our readers' and followers' origins and their areas of interest. In this article, we reflect on IIAS' communication evolution, spanning from the days of print media to the contemporary digital landscape. It's important to note that all the statistical information presented here is entirely anonymous, with no links or traces leading back to specific individuals.

Thomas Voorter, Communications Coordinator and Web Manager at IIAS.
Email: t.j.h.voorter@iias.nl

IIAS Mailing

Database and Mailing List

Since its inception in 1993, IIAS has been gathering information about individuals and organisations engaged in the field of Asian Studies, with the objective of updating colleagues worldwide about the latest developments. During the period before the widespread use of the internet, we distributed physical subscription forms to fulfill this goal. In more recent years, our mailing list became fully digitized and has grown to about 22,000 subscribers [Fig. 1]. We continue to distribute paper copies of *The Newsletter* at no cost to our readers around the world [Fig. 2].

Unless stated otherwise, all figures by Thomas Voorter, made with kepler.gl)

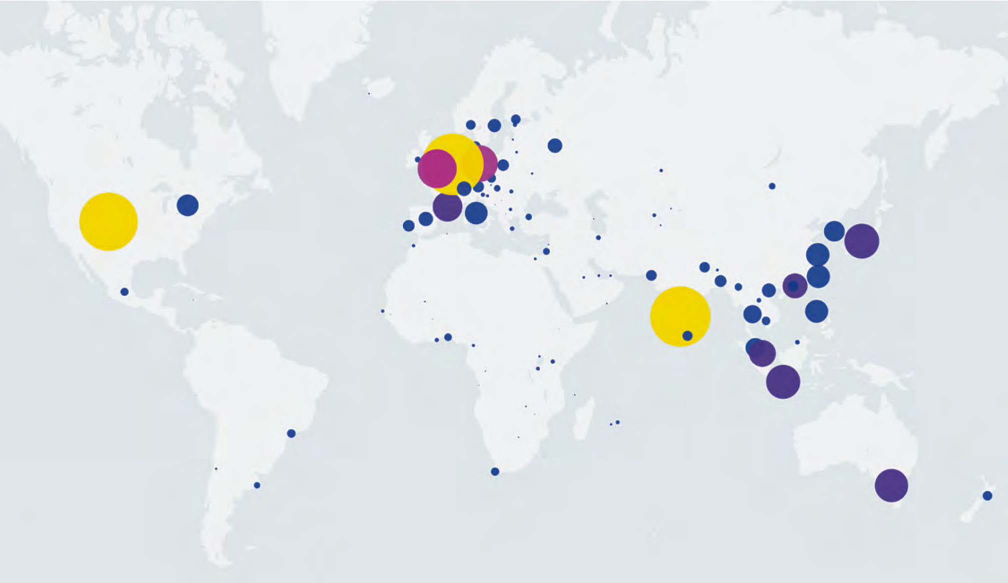

Fig. 1: Subscribers/Top 20 countries to the IIAS mailing list, 15 June 2023.

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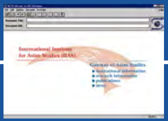
India	1662	Indonesia	545	China	267	Rep. of Korea	212
USA	1558	Australia	520	Taiwan	264	Malaysia	195
United Kingdom	710	France	420	Philippines	259	Thailand	168
Germany	631	Singapore	344	Italy	252	Belgium	128

IIAS Website

1997



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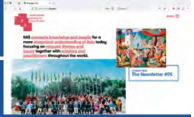


2018

Evolution of IIAS' Website (iias.nl | iias.asia)

In January 1995, merely two years after its establishment, IIAS launched its first website. In its early phase, the website served as a central repository for all things related to Asian Studies available across the internet. Branded as the "Gateway to Asian Studies," it provided the public with an extensive repository of online resources. As time progressed, more editions of the *IIAS Newsletter* were released, and information increased about the institute and its various activities such as conferences, research initiatives, fellowships, publications, and more. This expansion of content prompted shifts in both the design and the underlying technologies of IIAS' website. Figure 4 shows the distribution of our total website visitors between 27 July 2007 – 29 June 2023. Figure 5 illustrates the number of visitors from 27 July 2007 to 29 June 2023, along with their engagement on our webpages, represented as "page views" (total pages viewed by a visitor) and "sessions" (a series of interactions within a specific timeframe). A visitor can explore multiple pages within a single session, and each of these page views contributes to the overall count for that particular session.

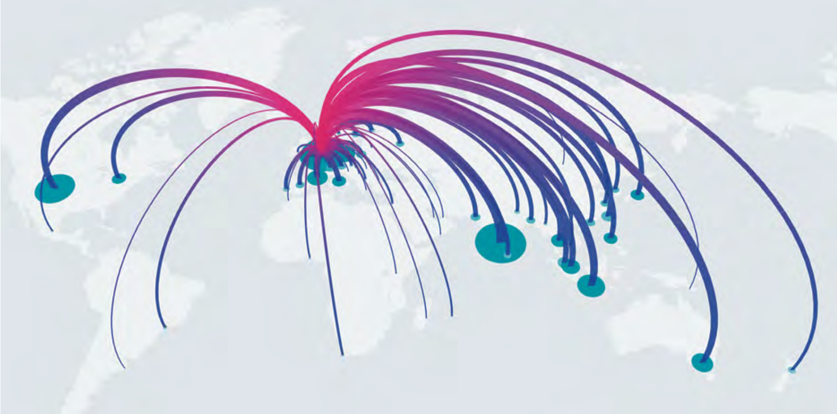


Fig. 2: Distribution of paper copies of *The Newsletter*, 2023. Top 10 countries.

India	378	Germany	107
Netherlands	375	France	80
USA	250	Australia	62
Indonesia	112	Singapore	57
United Kingdom	112	Thailand	46

Impact of our mailings

The COVID-19 pandemic has confined many of us to our homes for a couple of years. This circumstance led to an unparalleled adoption and utilisation of video conferencing software. Our traditional in-person gatherings evolved into webinars, enabling a worldwide audience to engage. The recordings of these webinars are accessible for viewing on our YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/asianstudies.

An recent invitation for the Humanities *Across* Borders webinar – *Academic Ontologies: Storytelling as Research Strategy* – was dispatched to the mailing list on June 25, 2023. A total of 273 individuals registered to participate in this event [Fig. 3].

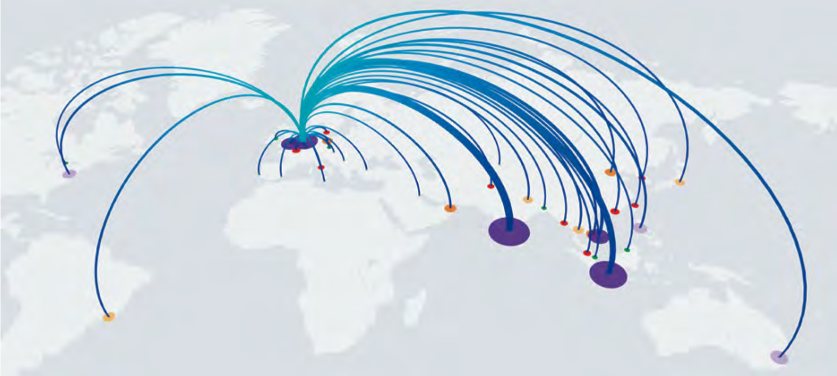


Fig. 3: Impact of the mailing *Academic Ontologies: Storytelling as Research Strategy*. Countries listed by amount of participants.

India	50	Germany	6	Myanmar	3	Kazakhstan	1
Indonesia	37	Oman	6	Pakistan	3	Kuwait	1
Netherlands	27	Brazil	5	South Korea	3	Luxembourg	1
UK	17	Japan	5	Taiwan	3	Malta	1
Vietnam	15	Nepal	5	Bangladesh	2	Portugal	1
Australia	8	Thailand	5	Brunei	2	Serbia	1
Belgium	8	France	4	Canada	2	Spain	1
Philippines	8	Hong Kong SAR	4	Czech Republic	2	Turkey	1
USA	8	Denmark	3	Ireland	2		
Cambodia	7	Italy	3	Singapore	2		
China	6	Malaysia	3	Austria	1		

IIAS Social Media

The Socials

In 2010, IIAS embraced the rise of social media by establishing a presence on Facebook and Twitter, followed shortly by a LinkedIn account in 2011. Subsequently, in 2018, our social media outreach extended to Instagram. Through these platforms, the institute is able to disseminate research highlights, share pertinent news and updates, and raise awareness about forthcoming events to a wider audience. Social media has evolved into an essential tool for connecting with scholars, students, policymakers, journalists, and members of the general public who harbor an interest in Asian Studies. As of 1 December 2023, we are delighted to be in contact with 19,000 friends on Facebook, 7250 on LinkedIn, 6300 on X (formerly known as Twitter), and 1200 on Instagram.

The majority of our Facebook followers live in Indonesia, although generally, X holds greater significance in the Global South. When considering the collective count of social media followers, subscribers to our mailing list, visitors to our website, and the intensity of interactions, it is evident that a substantial portion of our audience is located in India.

Facebook
19,000 Followers
Top 10 Countires

Indonesia	4323
India	2950
USA	917
Netherlands	801
Philippines	732
Thailand	677
Taiwan	473
UK	440
Malaysia	404
Germany	375

X (Formerly known as Twitter)
6000 Followers
Top 10 Countires

USA	884
India	683
UK	632
Netherlands	464
Indonesia	298
Australia	237
France	218
Japan	199
Germany	192
Singapore	161

LinkedIn
7000 Followers
Top 10 Countires

India	935
Netherlands	714
USA	249
UK	202
Italy	163
Belgium	139
France	118
Germany	114
Indonesia	103
Australia	71

Instagram
1000 Followers
Top 10 Countires

Netherlands	216
Indonesia	179
India	95
UK	32
Italy	31
USA	31
Germany	29
France	27
China	27
Singapore	23

Fig. 6: Followers of IIAS' social media accounts.
Blue = Facebook
Yellow = X (Twitter)
Green = LinkedIn
Red = Instagram

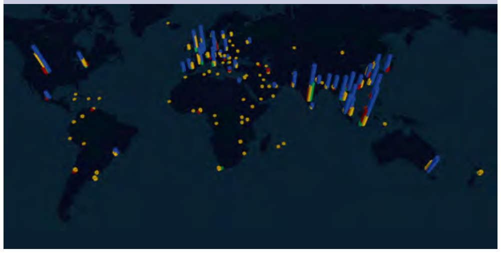
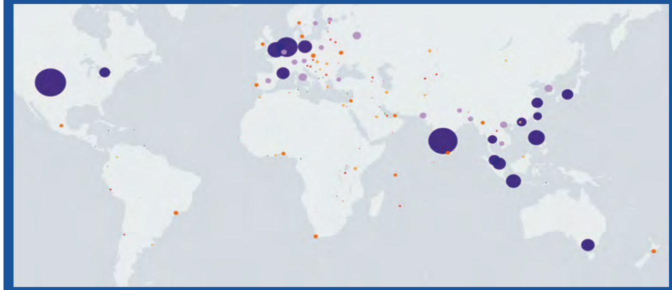


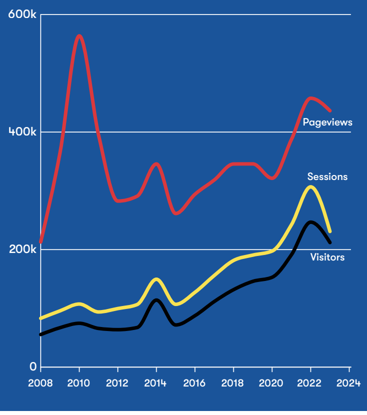
Fig. 4: Website visitors (2,437,133) per country between 27 July 2007 – 29 June 2023.



Top 20 countries

United States	353491	Indonesia	93063	Japan	57450	Thailand	36222
India	332373	Germany	84850	Malaysia	53290	Taiwan	34939
Netherlands	330964	Australia	73691	China	49463	Italy	34595
United Kingdom	118795	Singapore	71821	Canada	45807	South Korea	28588
Philippines	107107	France	67169	Hong Kong	39472	Russia	28570

Fig. 5: Number of visitors from 27 July 2007 to 29 June 2023, along with their engagement on our webpages, represented as "page views" (total pages viewed by a visitor) and "sessions" (a series of interactions within a specific timeframe). (Figure by Thomas Voorter, made with Flourish)



Year	Visitors	Pageviews	Sessions
2008	55476	212967	83071
2009	67135	365014	95808
2010	74625	563662	107395
2011	65877	394969	93917
2012	63753	282603	99727
2013	67434	290963	106576
2014	114100	345746	149561
2015	71804	261427	106923
2016	87584	294202	127388
2017	111681	318467	156022
2018	131853	345678	181522
2019	145966	345836	190669
2020	152939	321353	197518
2021	191199	387394	242211
2022	246719	457561	306782
2023	212000	436290	230865

1

Festivities, Roundtables, Open Days

Looking Back at IIAS' 30th Anniversary

In October 2023, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) commemorated its 30th anniversary. To mark the occasion, we welcomed colleagues and the public to our home in Leiden for two days of engaged discussions, cultural performances, interactive workshops, and delicious foods. Through collaborative exchange, mutual institutional support, and critical analysis, IIAS promotes humanistic and social scientific research across its various platforms, from conferences to *The Newsletter*, from book publications to public lectures, from research fellowships to intensive graduate workshops. In many ways, the October 12-13 events reflected and exemplified the spirit of an institute committed to building new communities of knowledge collaboration. On this spread, we feature a collage of photographs from those celebrations. Thanks to everyone who participated and made our anniversary such an enjoyable experience!

IIAS Open Day
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Programme Oct 13, 2023
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STREETFOOD
ASIAN
4

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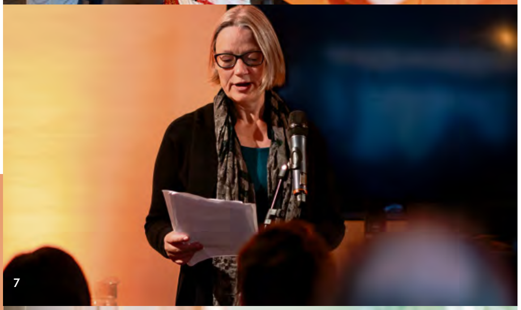
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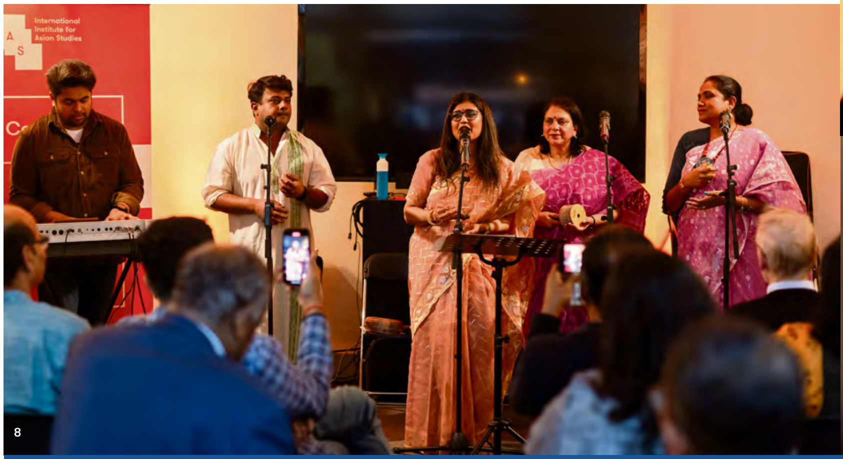
International Institute for Asian Studies
8

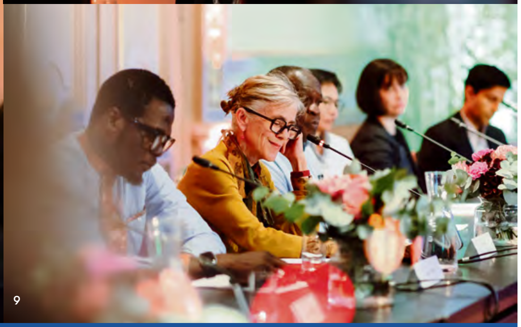
9

Fig. 1: Director Philippe Peycam leads a toast to celebrate 30 years of IIAS, October 13, 2023. Fig. 2: A curated selection of tea awaits visitors at the welcome table. Fig. 3: Musicians perform music from Central Asia. Fig. 4: Visitors enjoy a selection of Asian snacks from a food truck on the Rapenburg. Fig. 5: Participants enjoy a workshop on Filipino dancing. Fig. 6: Custom cake served at the IIAS Open Day. Fig. 7: Hester Bijl, Rector Magnificus at Leiden University, addresses visitors at the Open Day, reiterating the close connection between IIAS and the university. Fig. 8: A group of singers and musicians perform a selection of music from Bengal. Fig. 9: Colleagues gather for a public roundtable entitled "Decolonizing Area Studies: An Open Conversation," at the Stadsgehoorzaal.

Print Journeys

For IIAS Publications, we invite authors and editors who have recently published in the IIAS Publications Series to talk about their experiences. What inspired them to conduct research? What did they encounter in the field? What are the stories behind their books? For more information on IIAS books, please visit www.iias.asia/books

Designs on Pots: Ban Chiang and the Politics of Heritage in Thailand

Penny Van Esterik

What can I say about the experience of writing *Designs on Pots?* Life has a strange way of pushing us in certain directions. During a two-year period of teaching English for anthropology and archaeology students in Bangkok in the late 1960s, I occasionally photographed beautifully painted prehistoric pottery for sale in Thai antiquities markets. The following year in graduate school, I was all set to conduct dissertation research on the relation between Buddhist and Brahman ritual in rural Thailand when I learned I was pregnant. I thought life with a baby would be easier working in museums in Bangkok rather than in a village in Suphanburi Province, and I shifted my research topic to the designs on Ban Chiang painted pottery, based on my examination of private and museum collections made in the early 1970s.

Objects, too, have their life cycles. Consider the destruction of the Buddha images in the Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan. With their destruction, we lose irreplaceable parts of our rapidly disappearing human heritage. Buddhists recognize the impermanence of all things and can probably let go of the destruction of Buddha images more easily than curators and managers charged with protecting national heritage. In the case of Ban Chiang painted pottery, artifacts were looted and sold before the site had been fully excavated and recorded.

It has been over 50 years since I first saw those pots in markets in Bangkok. And it has taken me 50 years to tell some of the stories about those pots in this book. For reasons I relate in the first chapter of my book, I did not take my research on Ban Chiang much further than my PhD. I did not follow the usual path of extracting all possible publication value from my dissertation on *Cognition and Design Production in Ban Chiang Painted Pottery* (1976). Instead, I treated the PhD like a union card letting me practice anthropology. I reverted to focus more on cultural anthropology with a particular focus on food rather than pots. But I never forgot about those mesmerizing red designs.

Why the long delay in writing these stories down? First, the full site reports on the formal excavations made in 1974-1975 in Ban Chiang were not published until recently (2018, 2019). I needed to know more about the archaeological context because I am not a specialist in that subfield of anthropology with its well-defined research methods, although I did participate in several excavations as an undergraduate and also passed graduate-level coursework in the subfield. I viewed my work as based in cultural anthropology but making use of excavated objects from the past. Ironically, I spent most of my academic life at York University, where archaeology was not a focus. In fact, I removed my earliest publications on Ban Chiang from my resume when I applied for the job in the Department of Social Anthropology at York in 1984. I played up my other research experiences around gender, food, and infant feeding in Southeast Asia. I also felt constrained by my lack of specialized knowledge of ceramic technology, symmetry analysis, art history, and the complexity of the antiquities market – all areas of expertise that I deemed essential to writing the book. I was particularly concerned about addressing the issue of who was doing the looting and selling of antiquities to art collectors and museums. I tried to make up for my lack of specialized knowledge in researching the book.

Why couldn't I just throw out the old photographs and notes, acknowledging that Ban Chiang is just one of many sites in northeast Thailand that could contribute to Southeast Asian culture history? Did I leave the pots too long in an academic parking lot? Why take up the subject of Ban Chiang now? Moving to a new city after retirement provided the perfect opportunity to pitch out the boxes of articles, drawings, and photographs from Ban Chiang. I couldn't do it. Instead, my interest was reignited when I was asked to review the Thai Archaeology Monograph Series containing detailed reports on the excavations of 1974-1975 at Ban Chiang for the *Journal of Asian Studies* in 2020. This required me to review decades of advances in the field. A second motivation was receiving an email from a woman in Texas who bought a collection of pots that were for sale along the road to Ban Chiang in the early 1970s and who was now trying to repatriate them to Thailand. Shortly after, another email arrived from a woman in Ottawa who found boxes in a relative's new house that had formerly held pottery, along with around twenty pots still boxed, forgotten in an attic. The stories about how those pots traveled and the next steps on their journeys drew me to include the subjects of looting and faking in the book.

Returning to the subject of Ban Chiang 50 years later is rather like the community re-studies of earlier ethnography, except what has changed is me – the research instrument – not the object of study (i.e., the pots). I hope *Designs on Pots* is more than the story of an aging academic looking back with regret for the path not taken, for not speaking out sooner about looted antiquities, for not keeping up with an important regional topic like heritage production. In an era without apprentices, it is difficult for academic elders to share unpublished information that quickly becomes dated. How do seniors pass their stuff on respectfully in an ethical manner to the next generation of anthropologists? Looking back at my career in anthropology and Southeast Asian studies as I approach my 80th birthday, I think *Designs on Pots* is my attempt to answer that question. By utilizing the figshare feature at the back of the book, future scholars can build on my photographic and textual materials to answer new questions, as they deal with the trajectories of theoretical change and new archaeological discoveries.

Now that the book is finished and the stories and images are out there for others to consider, I can make links to broader issues beyond Ban Chiang and Thailand. I am reminded of why anthropology matters in this complex modern world. Anthropologists are interested in the human condition in all times and places. The discipline provides an opportunity to create models that go beyond weird – Western, educated, industrial, rich, developed – societies in modern times. Ban Chiang provides a glimpse into another way of being human. The site hints at a potentially unique way of life in a region of the world that has been easily ignored, partly because the legacy of Ban Chiang is artistic and technological creativity rather than monumental architecture or military exploits. The world could use another model of a peaceful, egalitarian, creative society putting their best artistic efforts in the graves of infants rather than warriors, of a people that made jewelry rather than weapons.

In the academic worlds of specialized knowledge, anthropology needs to remain a unified field – a discipline that makes room for multiple stories from multiple perspectives. The stories about the painted pottery from Ban Chiang demonstrate some of the ways that the past is embedded in the present. Some stories have been suppressed: the role of the American military in looting and exporting antiquities, the work of skilled forgers, art appraisals and tax fraud. Some stories have yet to be told: the production process from clay to finished decorated pot, the relation of earlier incised wares to the painted pottery, and the use of pots and other items as grave goods. Some stories, like the ones I tell about the use of pots in infant and child burial rituals, are quite speculative and destined to remain so.

The Ban Chiang stories I tell in the book, and those that will be told in the future, are not just about archaeology. The archaeological story in Chapter 2 is not independent of the looting story in Chapter 4 or of the forgery story in Chapter 5, and both are implicated in the heritage story in Chapter 6. The different frames relate to one another through my personal story, my life experiences, as discussed in the first chapter.

I hope that there are many more stories in addition to the six I tell in the book. Some of the issues for others to explore might include:
(1) Questions about heritage diplomacy, the ancient practice of gifting the cultural riches of a country to visiting foreign diplomats.
(2) Questions about recognizing the differences between deceptive faking, respectful copying, and outright appropriation.
(3) Questions about symmetry as a bodily-based regimen of skilled design practice.
(4) Questions about how infant feeding practices affect population expansion and diseases in mainland Southeast Asia.
(5) Questions about whether museums should display or hide away their Ban Chiang collections, knowing the collections had questionable provenance and were probably looted from the site. I hope that readers of my book will generate many more questions and I look forward to learning about their potential answers.

Penny Van Esterik is Professor Emerita of Anthropology, recently retired from York University, Toronto. Email: esterik@yorku.ca

Designs on Pots. Ban Chiang and the Politics of Heritage in Thailand

Penny Van Esterik, Sept 2023

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https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789048554980/designs-on-pots

Penny Van Esterik

Designs on Pots

Ban Chiang and the Politics of Heritage in Thailand

The prehistoric site of Ban Chiang in northeast Thailand challenges the narrative of Thai origins, while at the same time appealing to the public's vision of Thailand as an early centre of civilization. Ban Chiang demonstrates the complexity of constructing national heritage in modern Thailand, where the Thai national narrative begins and ends with Buddhism and the monarchy. *Designs on Pots. Ban Chiang and the Politics of Heritage in Thailand* contributes to the literature on cultural preservation, repatriation, fake antiquities as souvenirs, and the ethics of collecting, and demonstrates how heritage tourism intersects with the antiquities market in Asia. Ban Chiang itself is important for rethinking the model of indigenous development in Southeast Asia prehistory and provides informed speculation about the borders between prehistory, proto-history, and history in the region, challenging current and past models of Indianization that shape the Thai state's heritage narrative.

Penny Van Esterik is Professor Emerita of Anthropology, recently retired from York University, Toronto. She is currently Adjunct Professor at the University of Guelph. Her fieldwork was primarily in Southeast Asia. She consulted with UNICEF, FAO, and IDRC on topics related to food security and infant feeding and has broad interests in the cultural history of Southeast Asia.

Critical Intellectual Exchange in Turin

Soheb Niazi

Back in Delhi, during my master's programme at Jawaharlal Nehru University in the early 2000s, the writings of Antonio Gramsci served as a great source of inspiration. They captivated not only academic historians endeavoring to reframe Indian history from the perspectives of the subalterns (albeit with misinterpretations), but also resonated with left-leaning student activists. Gramsci's axiom – *"Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will"* – held particular appeal in addressing the escalating authoritarianism observed in university spaces, as well as in broader societal and political contexts.

When Laura Erber, the Fellowship Coordinator at IIAS, informed me about the possibility of a collaboration with faculty members from the Università di Torino, I was attracted to the idea of meeting and engaging with scholars based in the city of Turin. Often referred to as "the cradle of Italian liberty" and a hub of working-class and anti-fascist movements in the 20th century, Turin held a particular allure for me.

Undoubtedly, the research undertaken by scholars from the Università di Torino resonated closely with my academic pursuits, providing a compelling rationale for collaboration. Specifically, Professor Alessandra Consolaro's works on Hindi literature, particularly her focus on Dalit writings, closely aligned with my interests in advancing research on the literary realms of Pasmanda ("backward") Muslim castes. Additionally, the work of Marzia Casolari, Associate Professor of Asian History, proved invaluable. Her investigations into the relationship between Indian Hindutva Nationalists and the Italian fascists during the late colonial period of 20th-century India, along with her examination of British strategic interests and roles in India's Partition, significantly informs my research focus on the politics of Muslim occupational classes in late colonial India. Furthermore, the research of historian Tommaso Bobbio, centered on historical heritage and collective memories of past events, serves as a compelling reminder of the significance of meticulous historical research for our contemporary times.

Prior to my fellowship at IIAS, having completed my PhD from the Freie Universität in Berlin, my experience was primarily grounded in the German academic system. While in Leiden, I have been able to some extent acquaint myself with the Dutch academic system. However, admittedly, my exposure to the works of Italian scholars in the field of Indian languages and history had been limited. The collaboration with Università di Torino presented a valuable opportunity to expand my understanding in this regard.

Together with the mentioned scholars, we designed a brief research sojourn in Torino which encompassed three lectures that I presented to students across different levels within the Department of Humanities and the Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Moden Cultures at the Università di Torino.

My first lecture, titled, "An Introduction to Urdu Literary Culture," addressed a diverse class of Hindi language students in Turin, spanning various proficiency levels. This presentation offered an extensive overview of debates surrounding the origins of Urdu, discussions on the Hindi-Urdu controversy and delved into canonical works of Urdu literature, along with exploring various literary forms of Urdu poetry. The second lecture was tailored for slightly advanced political science and history students and focused on my primary research concerning caste hierarchy and social mobility among Muslim occupational classes in colonial North India. This lecture highlighted the multiple strategies deployed by Muslim occupational classes such as the qassābs (butchers and hide merchants the *mirāsīs* (genealogists and musicians) and the julāhās(weavers) to contest the stigmatisation of their social identities. The third lecture adopted a broader perspective, offering an overview of debates on caste and social stratification among Muslims in colonial and post-Colonial India. By contextualizing recent developments and debates on topics like reservation for Dalit Muslims or the implications of the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the lecture provided a historical context by situating these debates within the broader historiography of Islam and Muslims in India.

Interacting with students at Università di Torino was a learning experience, reminiscent of the vibrant atmosphere in public universities in India, especially when contrasted with the relatively homogenous settings of elite German and Dutch academic institutions. The professors informed me that many students traveled from distant places, managing multiple jobs to pursue their intellectual pursuits. While initially reserved in expressing opinions during the lectures, the students displayed a genuine eagerness to explore subjects beyond their own cultural backgrounds. During one of the lectures, centered on contemporary events and the current situation of Muslims, the discussion extended beyond India, drawing comparisons with the conditions in Palestine and fostering broader reflections on authoritarianism, Islamophobia, and the assault on dissent in university spaces across the world.

While Gramsci's presence in Torino has almost faded away (a fate shared by many significant cities, where commercial developments have turned the home of the Italian Communist Party's founder into a sort of luxury hotel), my interaction with students and faculty provided a glimpse of South Asian studies beyond the obvious European academic networks. It also provided a flavour of the fiery and politically charged intellectual culture that has flourished in the city of Torino.

Soheb Niazi is a recipient of the Gerda Henkel Stiftung postdoctoral research grant and an affiliated fellow at IIAS.
Email: sohebrniazi@gmail.com

Professorial Fellowship for the Chair of Taiwan Studies at Leiden University and IIAS

© Thomas Tucker/Unsplash

To facilitate the Taiwan Studies Programme at Leiden University, the Department of Cross-Strait Education of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Faculty of Humanities and the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) have jointly established a Chair of Taiwan Studies, based at the Faculty of Humanities.

The Chair of Taiwan Studies provides a Professorial Fellow position of five or ten months for a visiting scholar in Taiwan Studies to teach and conduct research at Leiden University and IIAS.

For further information and application procedure go to:
https://www.iias.asia/professorial-fellowship-chair-taiwan-studies-leiden-university-and-iias

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IIAS Fellowship Options

International Institute for Asian Studies

Apply for an IIAS fellowship

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Netherlands, offers a 12-month fellowship to support individual projects in the social sciences and humanities. The institute especially invites early- and mid-career researchers to apply.

fondation maison des sciences de l'homme

Combine your IIAS Fellowship with a short term research experience at FMSH, in Paris

When applying for an IIAS Fellowship, you have the option of simultaneously submitting an application for an additional one to three months of research at the Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme (FMSH), in Paris, France, immediately after your stay in Leiden.

KNAW

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.

Information and application: www.iias.asia/fellowships

River-Cities

Interdisciplinarity of Inland Waterways

Highlights from In Situ Graduate School
Padova City, Italy
18-23 September 2023

Thea Mercer and Dang Ngoc Anh (Graduate School participants)

Fig. 1 (left): Casone di Valle Zappa and the Lagoon Lodges. (Photo by Thea Mercer, 2023)

On 18 September 2023, 17 researchers from 13 regions were welcomed by hosts from the River Cities Network (RCN), the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), and the University of Padova. The In Situ Graduate School (ISGS), *Inland Waterways in the Anthropocene*, convened with the objective to survey Padova canals through cultural, ecological, and socio-economic frames. The intensive six-day event centred on peer-to-peer learning within an engaged participatory research exchange. This article continues that dialogue by way of presenting researchers' insights from that interdisciplinary seminar.

The central focus of the ISGS was on rejuvenation schemes of the rivers and waterways. Researchers learned of Padova canal regeneration and management projects, which have gained recent attention and momentum. Of particular interest were conservation activities that supported long-term funding models for the preservation of ancient inland waterways. The ISGS local convenor Professor Alberto Barausse, who serves as acting coordinator of salt marsh protection and nature-based solutions, has been instrumental in activating local participation.

Re-establishing a watery sense of place

One fundamental construct of the in situ graduate school was to critically reflect on the ways in which participatory engagement might re-establish a 'watery sense of place' in local communities. In the mornings, the programme was interspersed with panel discussions of field experts from a range of disciplines. Each lecture introduced a re-imagining of waterscape functions, conveyed ecological objectives in relation to the effects of climate change, and investigated historical and contemporary societal attitudes through literary works and fine art critique. Professor Francesco Vallerani – UNESCO Chair on Water, Heritage, and Sustainable Development at the University of Venice – opened with the idea of 'waterscape' and linked it to hydrography, in relation to "an aesthetic experience of the senses," which he emphasised might be evoked through thoughtful observation. Professor Vallerani challenged researchers to think beyond watery iconographies depicted in historical photography. During a lecture on urban regeneration, Lisa Zecchin, a PhD student at the University of Padova and Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Italy), presented on cultural heritage, the influences that canals represented for residents, and lost watery connections due to canal closures. Through a series of archival photographs, Zecchin showed the locations in Padova where remnants of the canal structure had been preserved. The afternoon sessions were dedicated to taking the lessons outdoors – sites viewed onscreen were inspected in person. Moving in small groups, researchers conducted fieldwork together.

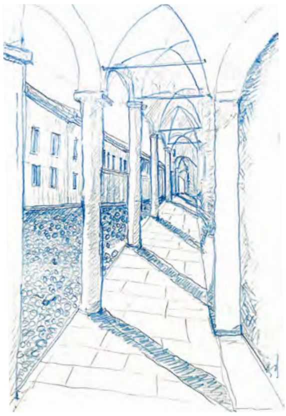

Fig. 2 (above): An arcaded street in Padova. (Sketch courtesy of Dang Ngoc Anh, Sept 2023)

Interdisciplinary groups were composed of fields including geography, architecture, ecology, art history, history, anthropology, economics, hydraulics, biology, engineering, and environmental science. The initiative, throughout the course of study, was for participant researchers to investigate two tracts of the Padova canals: Tronco Maestro and Piovego. Through close examination using strategic methodologies, researchers began to identify ways in which urban activities might aid and sustainably enhance the rivers and waterways. An exploration of the waterways began with on-site walking interviews, sketching, geographic information systems (GIS) mapping tools, and photography. As a mechanism of discovery, researchers from separate disciplines collaborated with creative methods, using drawings and photographs to investigate sustainability through socio-cultural, ecological, and economic frameworks. In preparation of a final presentation, each group created narratives to highlight their observations of the complex watercourse in a contemporary context.

Spatial connectivity: corridors in Padova

The opportunity to explore Padova provided a sense of visible interaction that exists between the city and its waterscape. The historical waterways which encircle Padova create paths that highlight green and blue corridors. However, a connection between these green-blue corridors – and their integration within Padova's urban elements – could be further developed. This divide is evident in the spatial layout around the waterways, where physical barriers or vacant areas often hinder direct engagement with the waterscape. Notably, Padova's city centre, located within the Veneto region, features pedestrian-friendly arcaded streets that link navigable urban paths together with expansive piazzas. The arcade streets, possibly termed grey corridors owing to their use of materials like stone or bricks since the Middle Ages, craft a concealed artificial space setting within the city's centre. This special urban design of grey corridors shields inhabitants from natural elements and connects seamlessly with open piazzas, forming city public spaces. This unique layout resembles an abstract urban river, serves as shared grey corridors, and sets an example for a 15-minute walkable city. How can the connectivity of such corridors contribute to the environmental sustainability target? This was one of the questions raised as research groups observed the inland waterways together.

The graduate school participants were organised into four small groups, based on prior GIS experience and disciplinary backgrounds, which included a balance of social and natural sciences, engineering, architecture, and urban design. The four groups conducted focused studies at specific locations and employed distinct research methods. Various dimensions were explored to strengthen the connections between grey-blue-green corridors, and viewed across social, economic, and cultural perspectives. Insights were drawn from discussions on nature-based solutions for revitalising urban waterfronts, as articulated in a lecture by Professor Laura Airoldi. The interplay between fluid and fixed spaces, the intrigue, and tension of water within cityscapes, was articulated by Professor Philip Hayward. Engaged discussion followed a lecture on Fluvial Geomorphology and River Management led by Professor Simone Bizzi. The immersive exploration of Padova's waterways compared the urban environment with aquatic landscapes, and uncovered challenges alongside opportunities.

Discussions on waterways extended beyond Padova to the Venice Lagoon, involving a one-day field study to explore (by boat) the practical application of nature-based solutions for maintenance. Professor Barausse explained the changing ecosystem in the Venice Lagoon and discussed the nature-based solution project to protect the Lagoon. Professor Vallerani provided insights into waterscapes as cultural heritage, and he emphasised the present-day detachment between the activities of Padova's populace and its canal network.

The discussion of connectivity between artificially constructed and nature-centric spaces involved several approaches, such as placemaking, waterscapes, and urban configurations, each of which highlighted the impact on the accessibility and navigability of these spaces. Human behaviour within these contexts encompasses pedestrian activities such as cycling and swimming, and our observations of such practices significantly contributed to understanding local engagement. The primary objective centred on merging methodologies within each research group to examine the intricate interplay among urban settings, natural surroundings, architectural designs, heritage, and waterways.

Ex-situ summation

In 1545 the Botanical Garden (Orto Botanico) was created in Padova. Preserved in its original design, a thematic symbol of the world is positioned in a circular central plot.[1] Many researchers individually visited the site to understand its layout, its history, and the connection between green space and the waterways. On the last day of the in situ graduate school, researchers left with a deepened connection to the rivers and canals. A greater understanding of its ecosystem was gained, as was an appreciation for conducting multi-method fieldwork as an interdisciplinary team.

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is a Master of Anthropology graduate from University College Cork (Ireland). She has conducted interdisciplinary ethnographic research in ancient landscapes in Mongolia, the Pacific Northwest, and Ireland.
Email: thea@theaproxy.com

Dang Ngoc Anh
is a PhD candidate at Université Paris Cité (France) and a lecturer at Hanoi Architecture University (Vietnam). His work focuses on environmental adaptation in architecture and urban design. Email: anhdn@hau.edu.vn

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Notes

[1] More information, including an image of the original design, can be viewed here: https://www.ortobotanicopd.it/en/architecture-1545

The River Cities Network

Engaging with Waterways in the Anthropocene

Paul Rabé

RCN is a transdisciplinary network, launched by IIAS in 2022, to promote ecologically and socially inclusive revitalization of rivers and the land- and waterscapes, cities, and neighborhoods that co-exist with them. The network brings together scholars, scientists, and activists from more than 30 project teams in the Global South and North, who seek to address local disruption issues confronting the river-city nexus in their areas. RCN's theoretical innovation is to bring together a (natural science-based) focus on strengthening biodiversity with a (humanistic and social science) focus on environmental and social "justice" in the quest to revitalize these waterways. The RCN teams engage with, and learn from, each other in the process of working towards their river revitalization goals. For more information, visit the RCN website: https://www.rivercities.world/about

Paul Rabé, Coordinator Asian Cities Cluster at IIAS.
Email: p.e.rabe@iias.nl

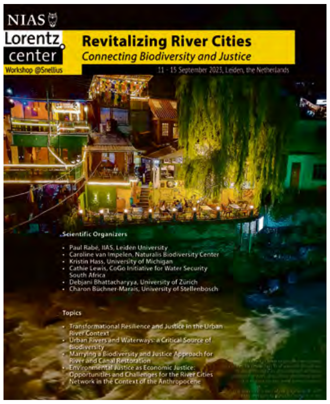
The River Cities Network Celebrates Its First Anniversary

Almost one year after the inauguration of the River Cities Network (RCN) in December 2022, RCN partners gathered face-to-face in Bangkok from 25-27 November 2023 for an internal roundtable discussion focused on network matters and an external workshop focused on the changing situation of waterways in Bangkok. Forty-two RCN team members and advisors participated in the internal roundtable meeting, representing RCN project teams in Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, Australia, China, Taiwan, India, Iran, Egypt, South Africa, Brazil, Serbia, Bulgaria, Albania, and Italy. For the external workshop, the RCN participants were joined by an audience of Thai activists, students, and scholars. On the program were presentations on the Bangkok water management context by Dr. Thongchai Roachanakanan, former Head of the Climate Change and Natural Disaster Management Center of the Town and Country Planning Department in Thailand, as well as a presentation on canal-side settlements by Dr. Boonanan Natakun, the Bangkok RCN partner from the Urban Futures Policy Unit at Thammasat University. On the second day of the external workshop, all participants travelled to the riverside community of Bang Kachao for a day of fieldwork. See the accompanying story in this spread. The workshop was expertly hosted by a team of local activists and researchers from Thammasat University, Mahidol University, and Rajamangala University of Technology (Thanyaburi). The organizing team was headed by Dr. Kittima Leeruttanawisut, an urbanist and steering committee member of the Sustainable Mekong Research Network.

RCN achievements during the first year

During the internal roundtable the RCN partners took stock of achievements in the first year and discussed next steps in the development and organization of the network.

The highlights of the first year of the network included a hybrid theory-building workshop in September 2023, in collaboration with the Lorentz Center in Leiden, entitled *Revitalizing River Cities: Connecting Biodiversity and Justice* (https://www.lorentzcenter.nl/revitalizing-river-cities-connecting-biodiversity-and-justice.html) [Fig. 1]. The workshop brought together RCN partners, advisors, and external experts from the biosciences, social sciences, and humanities to discuss theoretical frameworks and practical tools to bring together the two pillars of RCN – i.e., transformational resilience ('justice') and biodiversity restoration, specifically in the context of urban rivers and waterways. The workshop was guided by two main questions: First, how can perspectives from biosciences and social science/humanities intersect in the context of urban rivers and waterways? Second, what tools and methods are essential in a mixed approach that combines a focus on biodiversity and justice to achieve the revitalization of these waterbodies? The workshop yielded insights on both questions that will be piloted in upcoming RCN activities.


NIAS
Lorentz center
Workshop @Snellius
Revitalizing River Cities
Connecting Biodiversity and Justice
11 - 15 September 2023, Leiden, the Netherlands

Scientific Organizers
- Paul Rabé, IIAS, Leiden University
- Caroline van Impelen, Naturalis Biodiversity Center
- Kristin Hass, University of Michigan
- Cathie Lewis, CoGo Initiative for Water Security South Africa
- Debjani Bhattacharyya, University of Zürich
- Charon Büchner-Marais, University of Stellenbosch

Topics
- Transformational Resilience and Justice in the Urban River Context
- Urban Rivers and Waterways: a Critical Source of Biodiversity
- Marrying a Biodiversity and Justice Approach for River and Canal Restoration
- Environmental Justice as Economic Justice: Opportunities and Challenges for the River Cities Network in the Context of the Anthropocene

Fig. 1: RCN Lorentz Center workshop poster (Sept. 2023).

River Cities Network
Engaging with Wate ys in the Anthropocene

Fig. 2: Group photo of RCN partners with the Ambassador of the Netherlands during the closing session. (Photo courtesy of Cherelle Karsseboom, 2023)

At the end of September 2023, IIAS funded a six-day intensive In Situ Graduate School (ISGS) for RCN in the city of Padova, Italy on the regeneration of the ancient inland waterway network and the re-imagining of their ecological, social, and cultural functions in the contemporary urban context [See p. 51]. The hosts of this ISGS were the RCN's project team in Padova, based at the Department of Biology of the University of Padova, led by Alberto Barausse. Discussions revolved around the health of the canal system and the manner in which urban regeneration plans shape social well-being, meaning-making, sustainable practices, and cultural representation. Participants of the school were early career scholars from the RCN network and beyond, from 15 countries. The guest lecturers were a distinguished team of scholars and experts from across the disciplines, including biologists, geologists, geographers, economists, historians, engineers, and the UNESCO Chair on Water, Heritage and Sustainable Development at the University of Venice, Professor Francesco Vallerani (also a member of the Padova RCN team). For more information on the RCN Padova ISGS, please read the story on p. 51 of this issue of *The Newsletter*.

Outputs of the internal roundtable

In Bangkok, the RCN roundtable participants signed off on a new "manifesto" that reflects the network's values, approach, and methods (see text box). This manifesto is intended to be dynamic and will be adapted by the RCN partners over time as the network develops.

> *While there are still some 'wild' rivers that do not show obvious signs of human intervention, the majority of the world's rivers are now engineered, socio-natural assemblages. As such, they typify the broader phenomenon of the Anthropocene, an era in which humans have profoundly disrupted the planetary environment in both intentional and unintentional ways. [...] The RCN aims to provide generative guidelines that can inform international projects and help communities, researchers and governments that are concerned with the relationship between rivers and urban communities."*
>
> —Excerpt from the RCN manifesto, available in full at https://www.rivercities.world/manifesto

The RCN partners also agreed to create four new groups, each centered on a key theme: (1) river health; (2) living cultures of rivers and waterways; (3) governance, development and planning; and (4) riverine communities. These four groups reflect project objectives of RCN teams and will bring together teams working on these thematic areas across continents for regular exchanges of news and insights and for joint activities.

Bang Kachao

The highlight of the external workshop, on day two of the RCN Bangkok meeting, was a day of fieldwork in Bang Kachao, a peninsula formed by a meander in the Chao Phraya River in Samut Prakan province, just south of the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) [Fig. 3]. Bang Kachao is an old settlement, home to a mix of Thai and Mon communities, with smaller populations of ethnic Chinese and Muslims. The area has long been known for its fruit orchards: the brackish water – a mix of fresh water carried down-river by the Chao Phraya and sea water moved up-river by the tides from the Gulf of Thailand – and the rich soil are ideal for the cultivation of many varieties of fruits. An intricate canal system transports the brackish water around the peninsula to irrigate the orchards. Bang Kachao residents have always been proud of their reputation as "the best urban oasis in Asia."

Community representatives welcomed the opportunity to host the RCN participants in their neighborhood to engage in a discussion on the complex disruption issues currently facing their canal system and orchards, in the hope that this could help yield insights, lessons, and suggestions for Bang Kachao based on the international context and experience of the RCN teams. The discussions took place at the Bang Kachao organic farm, an enterprise and community center located in the heart of the peninsula. They hope that the outcomes of the joint fieldwork can help them as they proceed with their local activism. For the RCN partners, the fieldwork in Bang Kachao presented an opportunity to apply – as a group – their transdisciplinary approach and methods to a complex challenge around the deterioration of urban waterways, in conversation with community representatives [Fig. 4].

> *As an advisor fortunate enough to witness the culmination of efforts during a three-day meetup, the experience was nothing short of inspiring.*
>
> *The event served as a melting pot where diverse perspectives merged into a collective force for positive change. As individuals from various backgrounds, projects, different parts of the world, and expertise levels came together, it became evident that the common thread weaving through the tapestry of the gathering was a genuine passion for river cities.*
>
> —RCN Advisor Ereeny Yacoub (Egypt)

What is the future of the largest urban oasis in Asia?

The challenges currently facing Bang Kachao mirror those of Bangkok as a whole. A river delta city once crisscrossed by canals and known to the world as the "Venice of the East," Bangkok has in the past 100 years been transformed from a city living with water to a city that has undermined its waterscape. Most of the city's canals have been filled in for roads, and orchards have made way for urban development on a massive scale. Bangkok can today be identified as a land-based city in a watery, deltaic landscape.

The land use control plan for Bang Kachao officially declares the peninsula as a "green area," which provides some legal protection from land use change. But the protection offered by the land use control plan contains loopholes, which private sector developers are keen to exploit. The peninsula is under increasing pressure from urbanization: on all sides, Bang Kachao is increasingly surrounded by high-rise buildings. Large developers are rumored to be biding their time until the loopholes allow them to assemble land for big commercial projects on the peninsula.

To address these concerns, the government has introduced new measures to buy abandoned orchards and to transform them into parks, to keep the peninsula green. But how "green" and socially sustainable are these measures when they create natural areas devoid of community activity? Another threat may come from within, as one by one, small farmers and landowners are selling their orchards and converting the land to make way for small guesthouses and restaurants. Bang Kachao is increasingly on the tourist trail, as it is becoming a hub (ironically) for green tourism. The increasing urbanization is putting a strain on the traditional canal system, as many canals are destroyed and filled in.

Another disruption occurred about 30 years ago, when the government built a flood barrier around Bang Kachao, supposedly to protect the area from river flooding. As a result of the barrier, an area that flourished for centuries on tidal water and periodic flooding that brought in brackish water is now suffering from excess salt water, with excess seawater now trapped in the peninsula and unable to be flushed out by the tides. Water gates in the barrier remain closed. The combination of growing land use change and the flood barrier are threatening the remaining orchards in Bang Kachao, and both developments are upsetting a delicate ecosystem that has depended for centuries on brackish water. Residents and farmers report an alarming decline in plant and animal species, including the firefly, which the community has adopted as a bioindicator species given that its numbers have plummeted with the combination of external pressures on the local ecosystem.

Fifteen years ago, community leaders established a center to record the health of the firefly as a bioindicator species in Bang Kachao, and also to raise awareness among community members and local schools about the disappearance of the firefly and other endemic species. Community members initiated firefly preservation efforts, recognizing the significance of this species as an important indicator of water quality. Subsequently, they began daily monitoring of water quality. Over time, they have also undertaken various other activities, such as safeguarding rare tree species for flood protection and negotiating with the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority to secure recycled water for their plants.

Engagement with Bang Kachao community representatives

The RCN fieldwork day in Bang Kachao was organized around four main challenges, which constitute core problems faced by the community. All four challenges are inter-linked, but these four challenges were selected because they require special attention. RCN participants were divided into groups corresponding to one of the four challenges and corresponding to their own professional interests and experience. Each group was led by a member of the local organizing committee and accompanied by a member of the Bang Kachao community, who served as guide for the local context.

A first group focused on (legal and illegal) land use change. Questions included: What can be done to ensure that steady urbanization based on land use conversion does not further destroy local livelihoods (small farming) and the local canal system? And what is the role of land use planning instruments? A second group studied the flood barrier and excess saltwater. Questions here included: What can be done to mitigate the damage done to the local ecosystem and society from the flood barrier? (How) can local farmers adapt to the new ecosystem presented by the flood barrier, characterized by excess salt water, in their farming practices and traditions? A third group looked at socioeconomic changes, asking, among other questions: To what extent are residents of Bang Kachao (and particularly the young people) still committed to maintaining the orchards and the canal system, and what can be done (and by whom) to help preserve local traditions and lifestyles around the orchards? And a fourth group studied biodiversity loss. Questions for this group included: What can be done to halt or even reverse biodiversity loss in Bang Kachao, in the face of structural changes to the local ecosystem? (How) can existing community efforts be strengthened?

At the end of the day, the four groups presented their observations and findings to the Bang Kachao representatives. This was followed by a spirited discussion that considered various scenarios for the future of the peninsula. Community members vowed to continue their struggle to keep farming in Bang Kachao and to put pressure on the government to keep the river water flowing in and around the area. RCN partners concluded that the Bang Kachao example vindicates the network's approach to consider the revitalization of river and canal systems in combination with socio-economic, cultural, and political dimensions, as the health of urban waterways and rivers is so clearly linked to the fate of local communities.

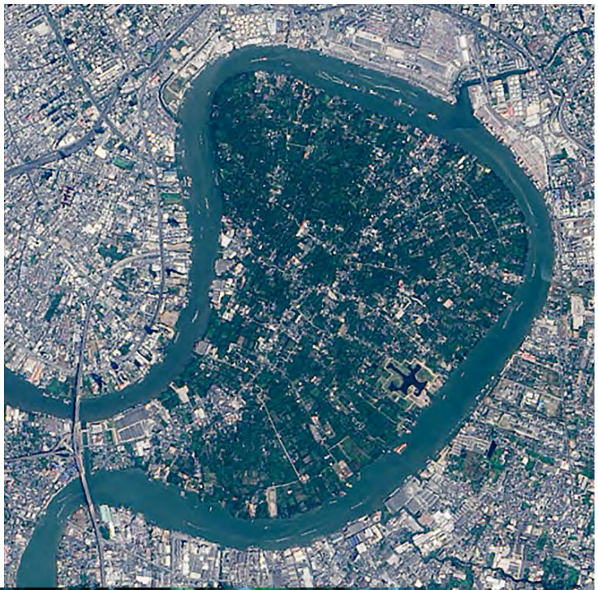


Fig. 3 (above): Aerial view of Bang Kachao. (NASA Earth Observatory image by Jesse Allen, using Landsat data from the U.S. Geological Survey. Public Domain.)

Fig. 4 (left): Making *krathongs* at the Bang Kachao organic farm. (Photo courtesy of Cherelle Karsseboom, 2023)

Perspectives from Bang Kachao community representatives

What future do you envision for Bang Kachao?

My dream is for Bang Kachao to become the "firefly island." If fireflies thrive here, it ensures good air quality for residents, positively impacting Bangkok's air quality. While I may not witness this in my lifetime, I hope the next generation continues this work.

—Sukit Plubchang, Firefly Preservation Group, Bang Kachao

What are your main goals with the establishment of this farm?

Primarily, this farm aims to utilise organic agriculture as an environmental management approach connected to a zero-waste strategy. So, the central goal and the main reason for the establishment of this farm is environmental management. We also focus on other aspects, such as carbon management. We plan to establish a carbon bank within the organic agriculture network to generate additional income for farmers besides their income next to farming.

—Taweesak Ongiam, Owner of Bang Kachao Organic Farm

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

IIAS Research Clusters

Asian Cities

The Cities cluster investigates urbanisation in Asia in a comparative perspective between cities in Asia and the rest of the world. It deals with cities and urban cultures, with their issues of flows and fluxes, ideas and goods, and cosmopolitism and connectivity at their core, as they frame the existence of vibrant 'civil societies' and political micro-cultures. Through the cluster's networks, IIAS aims to create an international knowledge 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 transnational 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 projects are the Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network (SEANNET) and the River Cities Network (RCN).

www.ukna.asia
Coordinator: Paul Rabé
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Clusters: Asian Cities; Asian Heritages

River Cities Network

The 'River Cities Network' (RCN) is a new transdisciplinary and global network to promote the inclusive revitalisation of rivers and waterways and the landscapes /waterscapes, cities and neighbourhoods that co-exist with them. The Network comprises over 30 project teams from around the world, each of which critically examines a local river-city relationship (the 'river-city nexus'). RCN is coordinated from the Urban Cluster at IIAS. Its Board of Advisors includes prominent people in their fields from the Humanities, Social sciences, and Natural Sciences.

International Conference: Inland Waterscapes: Nature, Society and Culture in Hydrography (Udine, Italy – 22-25 May 2024).
www.iias.asia/events/inland-waterscapes-nature-society-and-culture-hydrography

www.ukna.asia/river-cities
Coordinators: Paul Rabé
Email: p.e.rabe@iias.nl
and Satya Patchineelam
Email: s.maia.patchineelam@iias.nl
Cluster: Asian Cities

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
Cluster: Global Asia

Dual Degree in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe

The Dual Degree forms part of a broader ambition to decentralise the production of knowledge about Asia by establishing a platform for continuing dialogues between universities located in Asia and beyond. The present institutions involved in the Dual Degree – IIAS, Leiden University, National Taiwan University and Yonsei University – have established a fruitful collaboration in research and teaching and talks are underway with several universities in Indonesia and North Africa. In 2023, IIAS signed an MoU to develop a programme with Universitas Gadjah Mada in Indonesia. The Dual Degree programme offers selected students the opportunity to follow a full year of study at one of the partner institutes with full credits and two MA degrees.

www.iias.asia/programmes/critical-heritage-studies
Coordinator: Elena Paskaleva
e.g.paskaleva@hum.leidenuniv.nl
Cluster: Asian Heritages

Humanities *Across* Borders

'Humanities Across Borders' (HAB) is an educational cooperation programme, co-funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in New York, that aims to create shared, humanities-grounded, interdisciplinary curricula and context-sensitive learning methodologies at the graduate and postgraduate levels.

Twenty universities in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas contribute time and resources to this unique and innovative venture. The HAB partners are now in the process of signing a joint agreement that will bring them together in a vibrant international consortium, committed to building new humanist capacities at the inter-institutional level, including thematic projects, syllabi, and joint classrooms with other continents.

This new phase (2021-2026) builds on the groundwork laid during the first phase of the programme, under the title 'Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World' (2016-2021).

Follow the stories on the Humanities Across Borders Blog
humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog
www.iias.asia/hab
Clusters: **Global Asia; Asian Heritages**

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, including migratory movements, transformations in cultural, linguistic and religious practices, ethnic mobilisation, conflict, marginalisation and environmental concerns. ABRN organises a conference in one of these border regions every two years in co-operation with a local partner.

www.iias.asia/programmes/asian-borderlands-research-network
Cluster: **Global Asia**

Africa-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge

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.

An important development (in February 2023) is the birth of the 'Collaborative Africa-South East Asia Platform (CASAP)', a groundbreaking new network involving two universities in Indonesia and three in Africa. (See, The Newsletter, issue 95, page 53).

www.iias.asia/networks/africa-asia
Cluster: **Global Asia**

International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS)

© Hongky Zein, Urban Sketchers Surabaya, 2019

The International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) is the largest global forum for academics and civil society exchange on Asia. It 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 by IIAS in cooperation with local universities, cities and institutions and are attended by scholars and other experts, institutions and publishers from around 60 countries. The biennial 'ICAS Book Prize' (IBP) awards 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. Twelve conventions have been held since 1997 (Leiden, Berlin, Singapore, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Daejon, Honolulu, Macao, Adelaide, Chiang Mai and, again, Leiden. ICAS 12, together with Kyoto Seika University, Japan, took place online).

ICAS 13 'Crossways of Knowledge - An international Conference-Festival' will take place in Surabaya, Indonesia from 28 July until 1 August 2024.

www.icas.asia

The Geopolitical Economy of Energy Transition: Comparing China's Belt and Road Initiative and the European Union

This interdisciplinary joint research programme between the Institute of European Studies of Macau and IIAS, in cooperation with Durham University (UK), brings together 25 researchers from 13 institutes in the EU and China to account for the dramatic transformations across Eurasia since 2000 vis-a-vis the energy security strategies of China and the EU and the two sides' interactions. The study includes approaches to fossil fuel supply security, climate change and the challenges of the transition to renewable energy, and investigates China's Belt and Road Initiative in 29 selected countries and regions in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America. The programme aims to help build new research collaborations, nurturing the participation of junior researchers. The expected research output includes publications of peer-reviewed monograph(s), special issues of key specialized peer-reviewed journals and policy briefings.

www.iias.asia/programmes/geopolitical-economy-energy-transition-China-BRI-EU
Inquiries: **Mehdi P. Amineh**
Email: m.p.amineh@uva.nl
Cluster: **Global Asia**

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

This interdisciplinary research programme is aimed at the study of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of the Chinese government, with special attention given to the impact of the 'New Silk Road' on countries, regions and peoples outside of China. In addition to research and collaborations, the programme also maintains an electronic library of online resources meant to promote advanced teaching on the BRI and to offer starting points for student essays and theses. In January 2023, IIAS began supporting a three-year project entitled the Silk Road Virtual Museum, which showcases the art and culture of the regions that lay on the historical trade routes between Europe and Asia.

Coordinator: **Richard Griffiths**
www.iias.asia/programmes/newsilkroad
www.silkroadvirtualmuseum.com
www.iias.asia/programmes/newsilkroad
Cluster: **Global Asia**

Green Industrial Policy in the Age of Rare Metals (GRIP-ARM)

The ERC-funded research programme (2021-2026) *Green Industrial Policy in the Age of Rare Metals: A Transregional Comparison of Growth Strategies in Rare Earth Mining* (GRIP-ARM) examines the globalised supply and demand for rare earths, from mining to processing, manufacturing, use and recycling. Using a trans-regional comparison of China, Brazil and Kazakhstan, the proposed research is one of the first systematic, comparative studies on rare earths mining and economic development, bringing political science perspectives in conversation with natural resource geography and international political economy. GRIP-ARM is hosted by Erasmus University (Netherlands) and supported by IIAS.

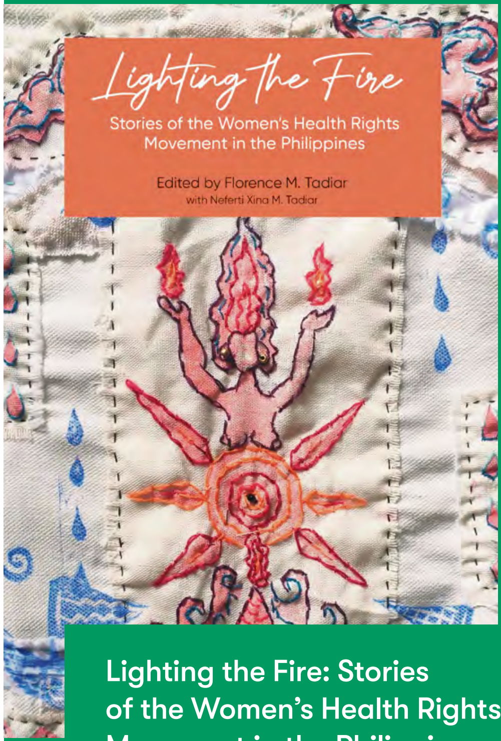
www.iias.asia/programmes/green-industrial-policy-age-rare-metals-grip-arm
Coordinator: **Jojo Nem Singh**
Email: nemsingh@iss.nl
Cluster: **Global Asia**

The Imprint

The Imprint highlights the critical work of small publishers around the world. Such presses, often located beyond the Global North, produce some of the most innovative, incisive, locally informed, and high-quality books within and beyond Asian Studies. With countless books getting published each year, many titles do not receive the recognition or circulation they deserve. All too often, the global publishing houses and major university presses – those with resources to invest in promotion – receive an outsized share of attention. Whether works of research, translation, literature, or art, the publishers featured on The Imprint regularly experiment to push against the conventions of academic and popular trade publishing. In this edition, we are pleased to highlight a selection of recent titles from Gantala Press in the Philippines.

Gantala Press

Gantala Press, founded in 2015, is a feminist small press based in Metro Manila, the Philippines. They work with women from peasant, labor, urban poor, indigenous, and migrant communities in producing literary anthologies, cookbooks, comics, and zines. A significant part of the proceeds from the sales of their books supports information and fundraising campaigns on food security and genuine land reform, gender equality and human rights, and national sovereignty.


Lighting the Fire
Stories of the Women's Health Rights Movement in the Philippines
Edited by Florence M. Tadiar
with Neferti Xina M. Tadiar

Lighting the Fire: Stories of the Women's Health Rights Movement in the Philippines

Florence M. Tadiar (ed.) with Neferti Xina M. Tadiar. 2021.

Gantala Press
https://gantalapress.org/portfolio/lighting-the-fire

Ang aking ina ay higit sa isang comfort woman
My mother is more than a comfort woman
The Mothers' Storybook Project Team
Naoko Okimoto

My Mother is More Than a Comfort Woman

The Mothers' Storybook Project Team. Naoko Okimoto (illustrator). 2021.

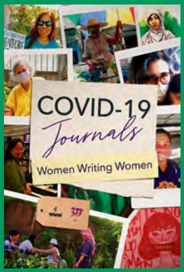
Gantala Press
https://gantalapress.org/portfolio/my-mother-is-more-than-a-comfort-woman

MAKISAWSAW
recipes + ideas

Makisawsaw Recipes x Ideas: Community Gardens Edition

Karla Rey, Carissa Pobre, and Joyce Santos (eds.). 2021.

Gantala Press
https://gantalapress.org/portfolio/makisawsaw-vol-2/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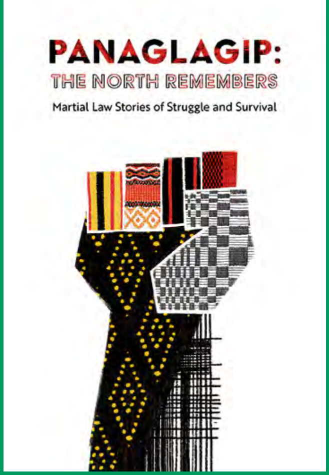
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