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The Newsletter

고려인마을
고려인종합지원센터
ЦЕНТР поддержки этнических корейцев СНГ
다문화이동

The Region

The Diverse Experiences of Refugee Groups in Northeast Asia

The Focus

The Ta-u and Their Island Home

The Network

The Indonesian Collection at the Leiden University Library

International
Institute for
Asian Studies

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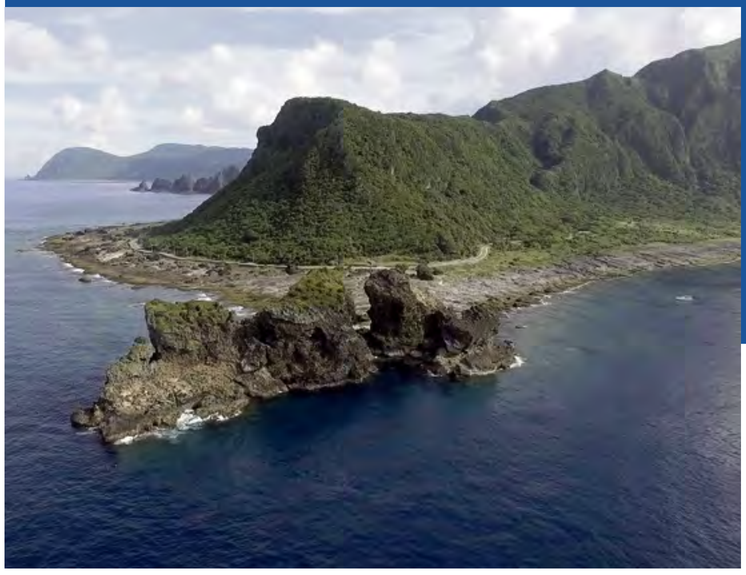
In this edition of The Focus

The Ta-u and Their Island Home

Annika Pissin,
Huei-Min Tsai
and Eric Clark

The small volcanic island of Pongso no Ta-u (Lanyu, Orchid Island), off the southeast coast of Taiwan, is the home to the Indigenous community known as the Ta-u or Yami people. This edition of The Focus explores the history of the Ta-u, their living culture, and the group's deep connection to the island they inhabit. In a model of collaboration and exchange, each contribution was authored by a member of the Ta-u community, yielding an inside perspective of life on and beyond Pongso no Ta-u. Articles describe cultural practices like boat-building, fishing, rituals, and home construction, as well as the contemporary challenges posed by tourism, migration, and ecological disruption. Most authors present their articles through a keyword in the Ta-u language, each of which corresponds to an object, concept, or component of the natural world that is central to Ta-u experience. These include reflections on the importance of *vanuwa* (the beach), *angit* (stars/firmament), *tatala* (the small boat), *kamalig* (the boathouse), *vahey* (traditional homes), and more. Taken together, The Focus offers a view-from-within on the persistence and transformation of Ta-u lifeworlds.



Left:
Aerial photo of the island.
(Photo by Si Rapongan, 2016)

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. 47-49, three colleagues introduce and discuss the renowned Asian Library at Leiden University, especially focusing on its extensive collection of materials from Indonesia. The first contribution comes from Marije Plomp, Subject Librarian Southeast Asia at Leiden University Libraries, who reflects on the library's resources and how they can be of use to researchers in various disciplines around the world (pp. 47-48). Following this introduction, two researchers – both recipients of the Lingling Wiyadharma Fellowship at Leiden University – discuss their specific projects with the collections and offer tips for other interested scholars. First, Muhammad Haidar Izzuddin describes his research on Ulu manuscripts (top of p. 49); second, Mohammad Refi Omar Ar Razy discusses his ongoing dissertation research about Hoesein Djajadiningrat, the first Indonesian to receive a doctorate with a dissertation at Leiden University (bottom of p. 49).

There have recently been some changes to the Fellowship Programme at IIAS, and Fellowship Coordinator Laura Erber discusses new developments and opportunities on p. 50. On p. 51, Taylor M. Easum introduces *Chiang Mai between Empire and Modern Thailand: A City in the Colonial Margins*, his new book in IIAS' "Asian Cities" book series with Amsterdam University Press. Finally, pp. 52-53 offer the usual snapshot of ongoing research projects and academic networks at IIAS.

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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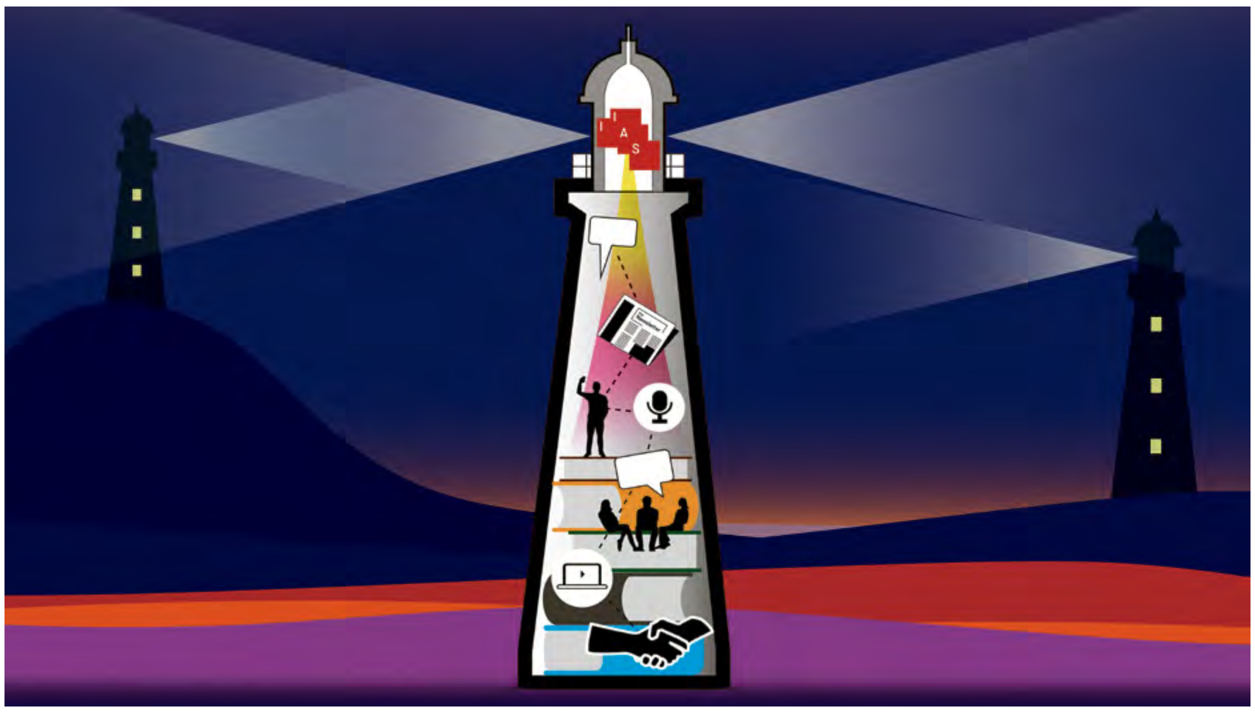

Fig.1: The Lighthouse. (Illustration by Narutai Riangkruar, 2024)

Facilitating Knowledge Exchange

A Special Issue Dedicated to ICAS 13

Paramita Paul

Welcome to ICAS! The 13th International Convention of Asia scholars will be held in Surabaya, Indonesia, between 28 July – 1 August 2024. We are expecting almost 1500 participants from all over the world for our first conference-festival (ConFest), a newly re-imagined form of the academic conference that engages both academia and society in knowledge exchange. This unique and locally-embedded experiential event comprises panels, roundtables, workshops, and fairs, as well as participatory activities in and around our ConFest venues. We look forward to an exciting week of connections, re-connections, and exchanges!

To complement our ConFest, we designed a special issue of *The Newsletter*. This is the last in our special series of three issues – #96, #97, and #98, published respectively in Fall 2023, Spring 2024, and Summer 2024 – commemorating 30 years of the International Institute for Asian Studies. The contributions in this issue all align with the concept of "Crossways of Knowledge," the title of ICAS 13. They probe what happens at intersections, when we engage across divides and transcend the boundaries between academic disciplines, knowledge sectors, and geographic regions.

Last year, as we were preparing for our special series, I sat down with Narutai Riangkruar, Assistant Coordinator ICAS and Conferences and a dedicated illustrator, to discuss an image that could suit the atmosphere and tone of this issue. We thought of our institute and its diverse activities as a lighthouse, a physical structure designed to emit light, to connect, and to contrast. The lighthouse is meant to provide navigational aid, as it improves visibility and marks ports of entry. It orients ships, but also collaborates with other lighthouses to facilitate understandings of space and place. Inside a lighthouse, systems of lamps and lenses come together to enable these processes, and to ensure and inspire movement and change. Fig. 1 is our lighthouse, fueled inside by our various programs dedicated to research, pedagogy, dissemination, capacity-building, and civic engagement. The IIAS lighthouse illuminates the world around us, reaching out to and collaborating with innovative, critical voices. It is at the intersection of these connections and collaborations that our institute, the ConFest, and *The Newsletter* exist and thrive.

Issue #98 opens with a welcoming note from our director, Philippe Peycam. This is followed by an introduction to the Airlangga Institute for Indian Ocean Crossroads (AIIOC) at Airlangga University, the host and co-organizer of ICAS 13, written by Irfan Wahyudi, Lina Puryanti, and Alexei Wahyudiputra (pp. 6-7). Their piece is complemented by an article by Adrian Perkasa, Project Manager ICAS 13 at IIAS, in which he charts the history of IIAS' engagement with Surabaya. Another partner, and the host of our upcoming Asia-Africa ConFest in Senegal in 2025, is Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar. Ibrahima Niang introduces this university, discussing relations between Senegal and different countries in Asia and anticipating what promises to be an equally diverse, exciting, and inspiring gathering (p.8).

This summer, we are delighted to present a truly unique edition of "The Focus" section (pp. 9-21). In a series of articles collected under the overarching theme of "The Ta-u and Their Island Home," our guest editors Annika Pissin, Huei-Min Tsai, and Eric Clark have brought together personal stories by authors from the Ta-u Indigenous community of Pongso no Ta-u (Lanyu, Orchid Island), a small volcanic island to the southeast of Taiwan and north of the Batanes Islands of the Philippines. The Ta-u authors elaborate on the multiple dimensions to Ta-u life, reflecting on traditional practices and knowledge as well the challenges to Ta-u culture today. As such, The Focus epitomizes the concept of "Crossways of Knowledge," inviting us to consider fundamental differences between capitalist and Indigenous cultures, and to engage across knowledge divides. To complement the written collection, we have recorded a brief teaser episode on *The Channel*, our flagship podcast (https://www.iias.asia/the-channel). In the teaser, Syaman Rapongan, an elder of the community and a contributing author to The Focus, offers a recitation in Ta-u of ceremonial words and a poem. After that, Syaman Lamuran, another author, introduces the recitations and translates them for us. We strongly encourage our readers to listen to the episode for a deeper, aural experience of the world and the people central to this special collection of texts and images.

Connections across divides feature centrally at ICAS 13, and in this issue. Our articles in "The Study" cover topics ranging from Indian indentured laborers in the Caribbean and their representation in literature (pp. 40-41) to the handmade postcard as interactive object in early modern China and Native America (pp. 34-35), from portrayals of the "River gypsies of Bengal" (pp. 36-37) to the Vietnamese experience at the Paris Colonial Exposition in 1931 (pp. 38-39), and from conservatism and modernization in New Order Indonesia (pp. 42-43) to activists' struggles in Myanmar (pp. 44-45). Our guest editors for "The Region," too, have compiled articles around the themes of cross-border flows and mobilities, and about the shifting dynamics between the personal and the political, the private and the public, and the local, national, and global. Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC) offers up a series of articles on the diverse experience of refugee groups in Northeast Asia (pp. 27-29), while articles from The Asia Institute of the University of Melbourne consider female agency and activism in Japan (pp. 30-33).

This issue's "The Tone" contemplates the framing of an exhibition of the work of the renowned Turkish-Armenian photographer Ara Güler (1928-2018) (pp. 54-55). Meanwhile, in "The Slate," scholars from the Humanities *Across* Borders (HAB) network at IIAS and their colleagues report on a community storytelling workshop in Chiang Mai, involving participants who experienced trauma and displacement from Thailand and Myanmar (pp. 24-25). "The Imprint," our new page dedicated to highlighting the critical work of small publishers around the world, this time features a selection of recent titles from Zubaan Publishers, a feminist publishing house based in India.

We are excited about ICAS, but we want to use this occasion to also look forward to two upcoming conferences next year. First is the aforementioned Africa-Asia ConFest in Dakar in June 2025. In addition, our next conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN) will be held in Irbid, Jordan, in September 2025. You will find calls for proposals for these conferences on p. 5 (Africa-Asia) and p. 46 (ABRN). For now, we wish everyone a fruitful, stimulating time in Surabaya, and we look forward to connecting with you at our ConFest!

Paramita Paul,
Chief Editor of *The Newsletter*

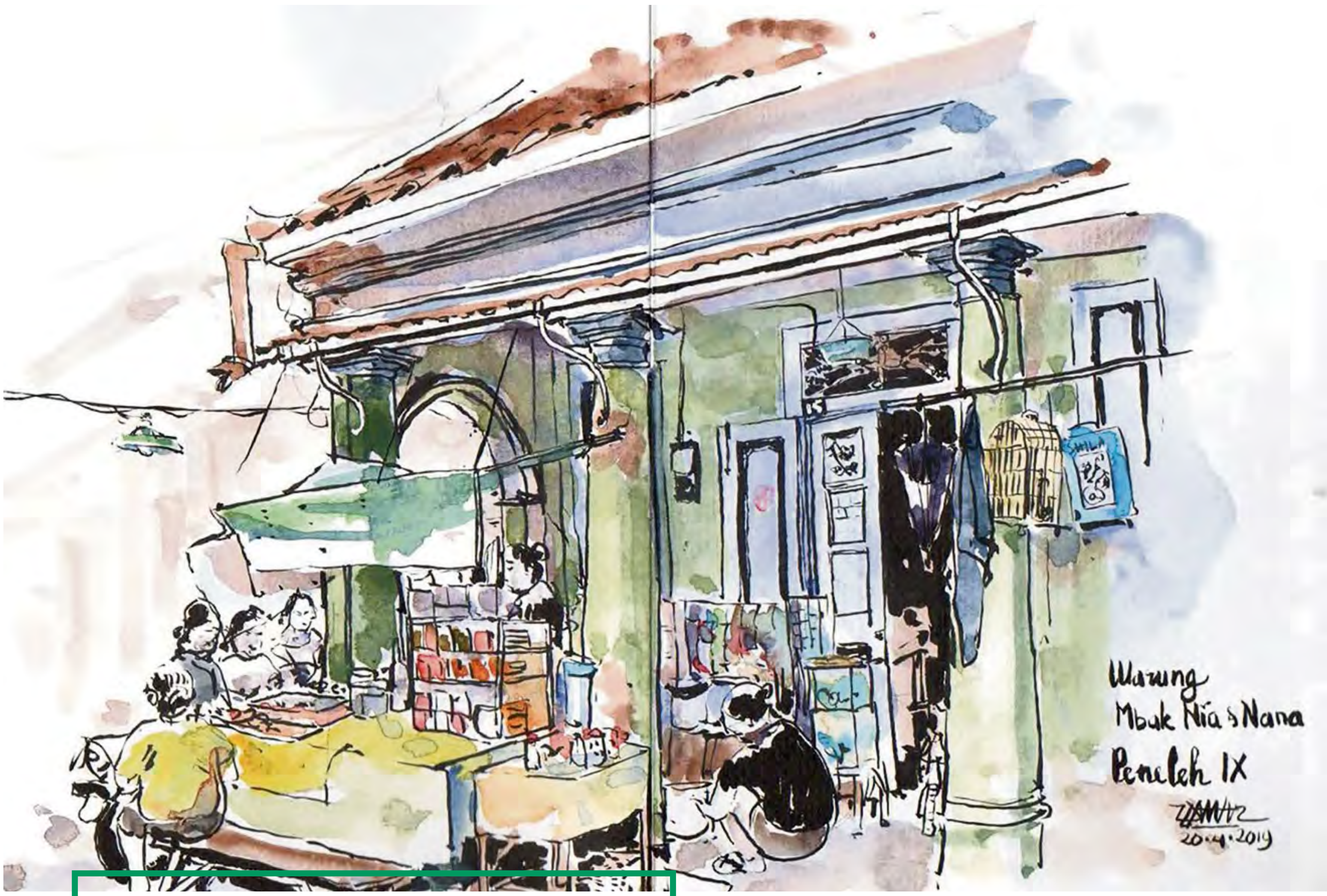

Fig. 1 (left): A local meeting place at a heritage house in Kampung Peneleh, Surabaya. (Sketch by Hongky Zein, Urban Sketchers Surabaya, 2019)

Note from the Director

Philippe Peycam

I am writing these lines from Tanzania, after a number of colleagues and myself completed a strategic meeting at the University of Dar es Salaam for the establishment of an interdisciplinary Asia-Africa 'hub' there. This example of gathering for strategic institution-building is one of a series of similar meetings that began in February 2020, when several of our close Asian and African partners met to assist our Thai colleagues from Kasetsart University in Bangkok with the creation of the Kasetsart University Africa-Asia Programme, which in 2022 became Kasetsart University Asia-Africa Centre (KUAAC).

Since then, there have been a few other important steps in that direction, in particular the establishment of the Airlangga Institute of Indian Ocean Crossroads (AIIOC) in May 2023. AIIOC is an autonomous, inter-faculty full-fledged structure emanating from Airlangga University in Surabaya, Indonesia, again with partners from the two regions (Africa and Asia). Before this major institution-building achievement, several equally transformative collaborative efforts were made to establish new inter-regional platforms such as the Collective Africa-Southeast Asia Platform (CASAP), Humanities *Across* Borders (HAB), and the River Cities Network (RCN). If this was not enough, I was recently invited in Athens, Greece, to brainstorm with local colleagues from Panteion University on the idea of setting up another inter-regional hub, this, within the framework of the European Alliance for Asian Studies of which IIAS operates as the Secretariat.

As far as IIAS is concerned, this collective institution- and network-building effort lays at the intersection of two trends long pioneered by the institute. The first we now call 'South-South-North,' expressed clearly in the Africa-Asia collaborative axis and, in particular, the Collective Africa-Southeast Asia Platform (CASAP). The second trend relates to a self-reflexive process within IIAS regarding its mission and its role in Leiden University. This internal process benefited from the groundbreaking experience represented by the HAB initiative. The programme was first established with a goal of transcending the old 'Area Studies' model, considering the state of deep entanglement existing between disciplines and geographies. In its second iteration, the platform-programme, hitherto entitled HAB, embraced a conscious vision of re-thinking the act of knowledge-sharing within the university as well as between the university and society in a global-local framework. Somehow the COVID experience further helped IIAS in identifying some of its multiple roles through the articulation of five better delineated complementary functions: (1) research facilitation, (2) pedagogical innovation, (3) knowledge dissemination, (4) network building, and (5) civic commit-ment. It is through the prism of these outward collaborative functions that IIAS sees its contribution to the elaboration of Leiden University's international strategy.

This issue goes to print on the eve of the highly innovative initiative represented by ICAS 13 in Surabaya (July 28 – August 1, 2024). This iteration of ICAS takes the form of an assumed academic-society articulated Conference-Festival, or ConFest, the first ICAS of its kind in the aftermath of COVID. As we approach this event, I can say that IIAS continues its development and transformation, more conscious of its role, impact, and position as a catalysing space and a structured 'clearing house' devoted to local-global knowledge encounters. The institute stands as a necessary link between the university system and the different communities it is destined to serve, in Asia and beyond. IIAS is a space through which the act of craftsmanship of innovative knowledge generation and sharing can reclaim its full agency against an otherwise fragmentary and crudely utilitarian model embedded in a regime of increased commodification of higher education.

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IIAS
30 Years
of Knowledge
Collaboration
Asia and
yond
IIAS
30
Lina PURYANTI
Philippe PEYCAM

Fig. 2 (below): Philippe Peycam and Lina Puryanti co-moderating a roundtable discussion during the event Decolonizing Area Studies. An Open Conversation in Leiden, October 12, 2023. (Photo courtesy of IIAS, 2023)

The International Conference-Festival (ConFest) ‘Africa-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge’

3rd Edition, Dakar, Senegal
11-14 June 2025

Organized by Cheikh Anta Diop University (UCAD)
and Collective Africa-Southeast Asia Platform (CASAP)
and International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS)

Call for Proposals

Deadline: 1 October 2024

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Dakar is a thriving cosmopolitan city with a vibrant tapestry of history and creativity. It is the main cultural and intellectual hub of francophone West Africa, capitalizing on a long heritage of cross-cultural relations with the American, Caribbean, European, Middle Eastern and Asian world regions, and, of course, with the vast and diverse African continent itself. The city is located at the most western tip of the continent. The label ‘Teranga’ (hospitality in Wolof) best characterizes the capital of Senegal, where arts, music, dance, gastronomy, and the legendary Senegalese conviviality combine to capture any visitor’s imagination.

Thus, Dakar offers an ideal location for the third edition of *Africa-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge*, and we look forward to meeting you there!

Call for Proposals

Building on the multiple encounters, interactions and dialogues initiated at the first Africa-Asia Conference (Accra, Ghana, 2015) and the second Africa-Asia Conference (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 2018), this third edition of the ‘Africa-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge’ event seeks to deepen the explorations of new realities and long histories connecting Africa and Asia.

The collaborative mission of Cheikh Anta Diop University (UCAD, Dakar, Senegal), Collective Africa-Southeast Asia Platform (CASAP, Bangkok, Thailand) and the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS, Leiden, The Netherlands) aims to stimulate inquiry into the rich resources offered by the city of Dakar and its surroundings. In this way, the city itself enables the materialisation of an experiential Conference-Festival (ConFest) that celebrates diversity within academia, but that also extends beyond academia into civil society and the arts.

The ConFest aims to solidify an infrastructure of engagement, bringing together participants from a broad array of disciplinary backgrounds and regional specialisations including scholars, artists, intellectuals and educators based in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere around the world. Over the course of four days in Dakar, participants will be encouraged to think both comparatively and holistically about the challenges and possibilities of cross-continental and trans-regional encounters.

Emphasizing an inclusive approach, the conference, modelled after IIAS’ International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) events, will be organized around a series of 12 thematic clusters, all of which highlight multiple flows and mobilities linking the two continents. For a full list and description of these themes, visit https://www.iias.asia/event/africa-asia-new-axis-knowledge-third-edition.

The central unifying theme for the conference – ‘Africa-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge’ – is a call to understand the histories and futures of Africa-Asia as unfolding in tandem, in order to rethink the methodologies and knowledge practices through which we understand Africa-in-Asia, Asia-in-Africa, and beyond. In short, it compels us to conceptualise the taken-for-granted geographies of academic inquiry and to challenge traditional constructions of world regions as discrete ‘fields of study’.

Topics can be explored through various formats, including papers, panels, roundtables, posters, audio-visual media and more. We welcome new formats and innovative suggestions for activities, workshops and exhibitions that will enrich the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

Submission Portal
https://www.iias.asia/event/africa-asia-new-axis-knowledge-third-edition

Proposals should be in English, French or Portuguese. They should be submitted online by 1 October 2024.

Africa-Asia Book, Craft and Food Fair
Publishers and institutes are invited to exhibit at the Book, Craft and Food Fair at Africa-Asia 3. Should you be interested in exhibiting at Africa-Asia 3, please email us at AfricaAsia@iias.nl

Information
For queries about Africa-Asia 3, please see our website at https://www.iias.asia/event/africa-asia-new-axis-knowledge-third-edition or contact us at AfricaAsia@iias.nl

Fig. 1: Lina Puryanti speaks as part of a roundtable with partners in Tanzania. (Photo courtesy of the University of Dar es Salaam, 2024)

ICAS, Universitas Airlangga, AIIOC

The Story From Within

Irfan Wahyudi, Lina Puryanti, and Alexei Wahyudiputra

A story of the birth of the Airlangga Institute of Indian Ocean Crossroads (AIIOC) was already told in an article penned by Philippe Peycam in the 95th edition of the *IIAS Newsletter*. That specific piece illuminated a chronological outlook on how the initial idea of AIIOC was firstly stimulated, and was finally realized. In this opportunity, we would like to enrich what has been written by Philippe with a sequential continuation of AIIOC's activities following IIAS and Leiden University's visit to Surabaya in May 2023, and of our future as we venture as an international hub with our various partners.

AIIOC: What's in a name?

The Airlangga Institute for Indian Ocean Crossroads (AIIOC) is the leading partner organization in Indonesia that will host the ICAS 13 Conference-Festival. Stories from the birth of this organization are interesting, especially in its interpretation of the Asia-Africa connections that were built through a series of dialogues, roundtables, and seminars. It was established from one of the most renowned universities in Indonesia: Universitas Airlangga (UNAIR). Located in Surabaya, East Java, the spirit of knowledge production in this campus has always supported scholars with diverse perspectives to maintain curiosity and engagement with specific cases in the society. The so-called ethos in learning, researching, and engagement – the *tri dharma* – has brought ideas to nurture knowledge and further promote diverse ways of thinking into the mainstream of society. Diversity is one of the key characteristics of Indonesia as a nation, a spirit which resonates within AIIOC's veins.

The "Indian Ocean" in AIIOC serves as a literal and figural expression of what this hub intends to carry out. AIIOC was born under a historical paradigm of how the relationships between various South and North nations and cultures were built. This paradigm emerged through a series of historical encounters at different junctures, especially during colonization. The Indian Ocean is a witness to how the connection was built by the slave mobilizations and spice trades. It was local fishermen in Africa, India, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia that brought not only trade but also values, traditions, languages, and cultures, all of which consciously and unconsciously persist in Surabaya. AIIOC was further inspired by the ideas of how the ocean has facilitated multiple ideas and connections from South to South, from one culture to another. To ground these ideas, AIIOC gathers people from different perspectives, from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and from multiple sites of knowledge.

Fig. 2: Participants of the roundtable with IIAS, AIIOC, and other partners at UNAIR in February 2023. (Photo courtesy of Rohman Obet, 2023)

AIIOC is established by four faculties in the UNAIR: Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Faculty of Public Health, and Faculty of Medicine. It was initially a simple discussion in the Rector House in Surabaya between Dr. Philippe Peycam, Dr. Ni Nyoman Tri Puspaningsih, Dr. Lina Puryanti, and Dr. Irfan Wahyudi about how to make a hub for the South-South connections in Surabaya. Then, we agreed to invite more friends to discuss this potential and make a roundtable discussion in February 2023: "Envisioning Southeast Asia and Indian Ocean Studies." The invitees were colleagues from the Netherlands, Tanzania, Senegal, Zambia, South Africa, Singapore, Thailand, Estonia, Pakistan, Indonesia, and France. Along with the international partners and faculties are colleagues from Universitas Airlangga's African Studies Center, ASEAN Center, and European and Eurasian Center.

AIIOC is also established upon a lot of criticisms from outside voices that the campus acts more as ivory towers. These criticisms attack the detached nature of the university from the social reality around it, claiming that the institution is monotonous, elitist, bordered, and uninspired. Such criticisms are common in the discourse nowadays. The *tri dharma*, a moral compass for Indonesian higher education, is often enacted under a rigid disciplinary boundary. What lies under a collaborative spirit is oftentimes an unconscious competition motivated by various interests. These points become a driving force for AIIOC to cultivate a fresh climate of collaborative knowledge production not only within the university, but also outside with multiple actors.

ICAS, to start with ...

ICAS 13 is located in Surabaya, a city that embodies the fight from *Arek Suroboyo* (Surabaya Youth) against colonialism. The Battle of Surabaya (November 10, 1945) marks an early stage of decolonization by a city that was – and still is! – a space for collective identities of Chinese, Javanese, Maduranese, Arabs, and Europeans. Modern Surabaya encompasses the lively arts and architecture of these identities. Surabaya developed as a sphere for the decolonization of knowledge through its development as an industrial complex, a busy harbor city, a cultural melting pot, and a research and knowledge center.

As a center of knowledge excellence, UNAIR is hosting ICAS and using its pivotal role in knowledge production in Surabaya, which includes one of the oldest Schools of Medicine in Indonesia. Its ace card, the Medicine faculty, is strengthened by the equally strong existence of its faculties in the social sciences, humanities, and technology. Multidisciplinary approaches and collaborations further characterize the university. A consciousness of the importance of trans-sectoral and trans-disciplinary work grew during the COVID-19 context, where most approaches towards vaccinations had to be done both medically and culturally. Multidisciplinary teams from the university worked together to produce the vaccine and successfully launched it under the title *Inavac* or *Merah Putih* in 2022.

The monumental COVID cases in Surabaya also inspire how ICAS 13 is contextualized. ICAS 13 is not only a representation of the intersectional work of scholars, but also showcases and engages the multiplex socio-historico-cultural condition of Surabaya. Every piece of the city, whether its living people or historical objects, is entangled in an interconnected network. Thus, “Crossways of Knowledge” becomes a fitting theme for this ConFest.

A gaze towards the future

As ICAS 13 marks our initial agenda and the most intensifying propeller of our establishment, a sustainable future then becomes our main goal. Several capacity-building activities, workshops, and roundtables with our international partners in Thailand, the Netherlands, India, and Tanzania have been carried out. It reflects our focus that positions ICAS not already as our culmination, but rather as a strong start and foundation for our next path.

The festivity of ICAS brings us an opportunity to partner up with local Surabayan artist collectives. ICAS becomes an avenue for us to be immersed in their creative activities and to shape a future together beyond ICAS. Our collaborative projects also involve inhabitants of *kampungs* (neighborhoods) as a way for us to grow a novel inter- and intra-connected forms of knowledge production and consciousness.

Aside from our very locally-rooted activities, we are also fortunate to participate in the South-South-North (SSN) and the Humanities Across Borders (HAB) initiatives at IIAS. These programs put emphasis on transdisciplinary pedagogies and research agendas, in line with AIIOC’s spirit, in areas that are often overlooked in dominant discourses. The questions of *who* should produce legitimating knowledge and to *whom* such knowledge should be given are central to our attempts in rethinking and reshaping the vista of knowledge production. This spirit, gracefully instilled by IIAS, is also extended to our already-connected African colleagues in Dar es Salaam, where a research hub with the same spirit of AIIOC is about to enrich our network.

The excitement that we have for our future cannot be overstated. Accompanied by our strong and collegial partners, both national and international, we will further proceed to open up new programs (research clusters, fellowships for post-master and post-doctoral individuals, academic and artistic initiatives, and many more), always focusing on the interconnected Indian Ocean, literally and figuratively.

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The (Pre-)History of AIIOC

Adrian Perkasa

Surabaya is one of Indonesia’s largest cities, yet it is understudied. That's what I realized when I first got involved in the preparation of the Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA) symposium in 2017. In contrast to other Indonesian cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, and even Solo, which is not the provincial capital, Surabaya has relatively few internationally recognized studies. At least that was my impression when I exchanged ideas with almost all of the participants in the symposium. In my field of study (history), I know of only a few works by authors like Howard Dick, William Frederick, and most recently Freek Colombijn, among others. Therefore, I believe it was a great opportunity to host the UKNA symposium to push Surabaya into an intensive discussion with other cities in Asia.

The choice of location for the symposium in Surabaya was neither coincidental nor arbitrary. Surabaya was a part of the Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network (SEANNET), which was another program of the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) that took place during the same time period. It was with the strong backing of Rita Padawangi, the principle investigator and coordinator of SEANNET, that she and Paul Rabé, the co-coordinator of that network and the coordinator of UKNA, agreed to hold the symposium in conjunction with the launch of the SEANNET program. As the local primary investigator, I recommended Kampung Peneleh as a neighborhood that could be included in the program for several years to come. Historically, the origin of this *kampung* can be traced back to the 15th century.

Even so many centuries ago, Surabaya emerged as a major urban settlement, which subsequently developed into Indonesia’s second-biggest city today. The rapid urbanization and industrialization during the colonial period created complex legacies which affected but were not limited to the position of *kampungs* or neighborhoods. The term *kampung* in Indonesia received a more derogatory meaning and became a place where the authorities wanted to exert their power. As a distinct urban feature associated with elements of rurality (i.e., village-community), the notion of *kampungs* flourished in many parts of Asia, especially in Southeast Asia. Even in the Khmer language, the term is identical to that for ‘port’ or ‘haven,’ indicating the intensive and dynamic relations between many cities at the dawn of the age of commerce in this region. With this background, a *kampung* is not only a site but also a communal way to see the world and to be in the world. Attempts at molding collective human settlements into functional, class-based, ethnic compartmentalizations imposed by state and corporate norms that have elsewhere succeeded in fragmenting societies have so far failed to fully obliterate this truly Indonesian but also Southeast Asian way of living in society.

Since joining SEANNET's project in 2017, a number of staff and students at Universitas Airlangga, particularly in the Faculty of Humanities, have gained experience in interdisciplinary thinking and working on a local and worldwide scale. Our group uses SEANNET's community-engaged research paradigm to investigate various approaches to understanding urbanism, particularly in the neighborhood setting. In this initiative, we collaborated with Arsitek Komunitas Surabaya (‘Surabaya Community Architects’), to conduct participatory mapping with Kampung Peneleh locals. In addition, we invited Urban Sketchers Surabaya to host public sketching workshops in this neighborhood. Drawing, as stated in a number of works, serves a variety of objectives by distinguishing and assisting us in comprehending our complex environment. It may also enable us to discover, either via our personal experience of seeing, observing, and documenting, or through the shared experience of viewing another's drawn record of an event, by employing signs and symbols, mapping, and labeling our experience.

Furthermore, being involved in the SEANNET program provides many privileges for all members of the group to collaborate with and learn from various international scholars, artists, and communities. The students and a member of the local neighborhood association in Kampung Peneleh participated in workshops in several countries in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Participating in the SEANNET program exposed me to a variety of IIAS activities. Prior to my appointment as a lecturer at Universitas Airlangga, I had only established a connection with the institute once. I visited Rapenburg 59 together with several Indonesian officials during a heritage workshop in 2013. On that occasion, I was really impressed with how IIAS, under the directorship of Philippe Peycam, created various programs related to Asia. Subsequently, the acceptance of the paper I co-authored with Rita Padawangi into a seminar that IIAS co-organized in Taiwan provided me with an opportunity to learn more about the institute. I met with several figures who have been in this institute's network for several years. Philippe's invitation to attend a workshop in Zanzibar, just days before the Africa-Asia Conference in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, heightened my interest in such activities. In fact, IIAS also invited the director of Airlangga Global Engagement, Ni Nyoman Tri Puspaningsih, to the event. However, due to several issues, only I could join that inspirational event from Surabaya.

The relationship of Airlangga with IIAS actually originated during the early years of the institute. In 1996, IIAS sent a current copy of *The Newsletter* to the Universitas Airlangga’s library [Fig. 1-2]. After two subsequent decades of no significant collaboration, the relationship between Universitas Airlangga and IIAS has now grown stronger than ever. This was accelerated by the embryonic period of the newly established Airlangga Institute of Indian Ocean Crossroads. This partnership and mutual support has provided a model that we all hope will endure for many years into the future.

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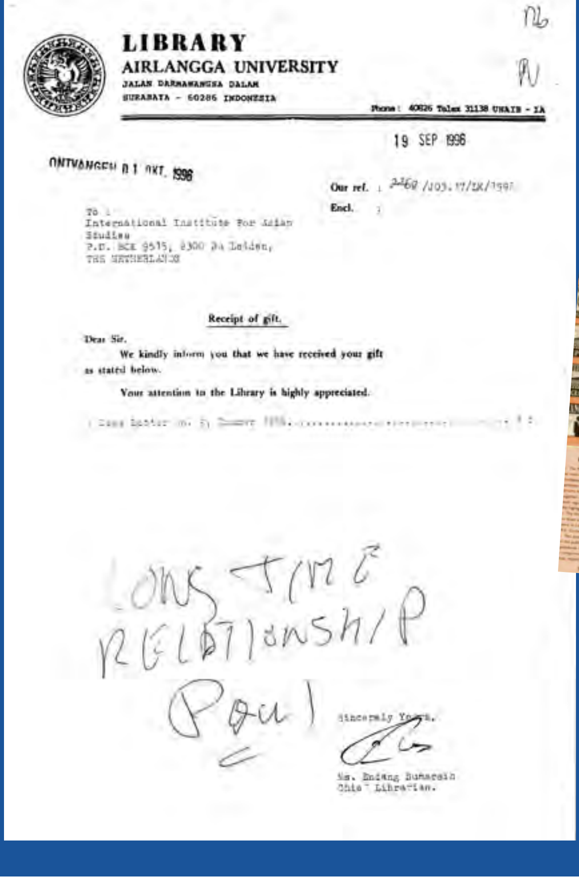

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Our ref. : 2460 /J03.[illegible]/IX/1996
Encl. :

To :
International Institute For Asian Studies
P.O. BOX 9515, 2300 RA Leiden,
THE NETHERLANDS

Receipt of gift.

Dear Sir,

We kindly inform you that we have received your gift as stated below.

Your attention to the Library is highly appreciated.

(News Letter no. 9, Summer 1996. ....

LONG TIME RELATIONSHIP
Paul

Sincerely Yours,

Ms. Endang Sumarsih
Chief Librarian.

Fig. 1 (above): Issue #9 of *The Newsletter* (Summer 1996), an early point of connection between IIAS and Universitas Airlangga.

Fig. 2 (left): A note from Chief Librarian Endang Sumarsih at Universitas Airlangga to IIAS, confirming receipt of *The Newsletter* in 1996. (Photo courtesy of IIAS)

Africa-Asia, South-South Partnerships, and New Collaborations

Ibrahima Niang

I was born and grew up in Dakar, the capital city of Senegal that is well known as a gateway in West Africa. Dakar has a large seaport, and its population is extremely cosmopolitan. First of all, I would like to briefly introduce myself as an academician, then I will discuss my role in ICAS as a member of the organization and scientific committee of the Africa-Asia conference and what we intend to do for the coming Dakar Con-Fest 2025.

IIAS
30 Years
of Knowledge
Collaboration
in Asia and
Beyond
30

Fig. 1 (left): International partners (including Ibrahima Niang) convene in Leiden for a public roundtable entitled "Decolonizing Area Studies: An Open Conversation" in October 2023. (Photo courtesy of IIAS, 2023)

UNIVERSITE
DE DAKAR

Fig. 2 (above right): The entrance of the campus of the Université de Dakar (now Université Cheikh-Anta-Diop) in 1962. (Photo courtesy of Nederlands studenten Afrika Gezelschap, via Wikimedia Commons)

In 2022, after many years as a non-permanent assistant lecturer, I became a permanent lecturer-researcher in the Department of Sociology at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, where I completed all of my courses. My research and teaching specialization is in economic sociology, geopolitics of emerging countries in Africa, and digital silks roads. Very early, I became interested in the presence of Chinese communities in Africa, with the initial research focusing on the nature of this presence, its motivations, and the resistance of employer organizations and Senegalese trade unions.

Working on these topics has enabled me to participate in Asia-Africa conferences organized on the continent, from Accra 2015 to Dar Es Salaam 2018, with presentations on discourses of the Chinese presence in Africa and on the history of Senegalese-Vietnamese descended from Vietnamese immigrants. For many years, I received *The Newsletter* and calls for proposals from IIAS and ICAS. This was the bridge between ICAS and myself until I met Stacey Links and Philippe Peycam in Dakar. Links played a key role in my involvement, as she contacted me first via LinkedIn to have a meeting when the ICAS team visited Dakar in May-June 2023. From that point, I began playing an important role in ICAS, joining its organizational board even when it was complicated at that time because of my busy personal agenda. In June 2024, through a discussion with Stacey Links and Phillipe Peycam, I was co-opted to bring my young touch and expertise to Africa-Asia relations, and to share my experience as a participant and organizer of scientific events.

In October 2024, I was one of the speakers at the "Decolonizing Area Studies: An Open Conversation" roundtable organized in Leiden on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the International Institute of Asian Studies. I was also a member of the very rigorous review committee tasked with selecting participants for the upcoming ICAS 13 conference in Surabaya, Indonesia. After the meeting in Surabaya, which includes many initiatives to build a great South-South-North network, Dakar has been chosen to host the next Asia-Africa conference. In 1987, Dakar University changed its name to honor the Senegalese physician, philosopher, and anthropologist Cheikh Anta Diop. The education system follows the French model: all courses are taught in French, except those in language departments other than French. Cheikh Anta Diop University is one of Africa's most prestigious institutions. Many Senegalese leaders of the post-independence generation are graduates of the university, and its alumni teach in universities around the world. Many African heads of state and leaders studied there, including the new Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye.

Cheikh Anta Diop University is located near the residential area of Fann-Residence and Point E, and the West Gate of the campus offers a beautiful view on the sea. As readers may know, Da-kar is a coastal city with three ways to the sea (West, North, and South). The Corniche, which is near the West Gate of the University, offers you a wonderful space of leisure for walking, doing sports, and gathering before the sun goes down. You can imagine, then, how the conference to be held there in 2025 will be a great moment of academic, social, and artistic exchange.

Having very early understood the importance of culture in exchanges between peoples and cul-ture's role in economic activity, Senegal was one of the first African countries to adopt a cultural policy after independence. Its guidelines were drawn by the President and poet Léopold Sédar Senghor, who made culture into an ideological instrument. Senegal has become a cultural show-case in Africa thanks to the actions of its various heads of state. Dakar is the cultural hub of Senegal, boasting an array of museums, nightlife, and music that will enrich participants' con-ference experience.

The university has no fewer than 70,000 students enrolled from many countries. The large amphitheater at Ucad 2 will be the venue for the opening of the Conference-Festival. The hall of the main library with its beautiful architecture has been chosen as the site for photos exhibition, musical performances, and the publisher's expo. The new building of the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences will host the parallel workshops and sessions in its multiple classrooms. This Conference-Festival is high on the agenda of Cheikh Anta Diop University, as we hope to welcome no less than 500 attendees from all around the world.

I am working with Professor Mamadou Fall and Philippe Peycam to bring academics together with filmmakers, musicians, designers, grassroots activists, and artists. Our intention is to make this the most beautiful Asia-Africa conference ever organized on the African continent. From its scientific inception to the production of the Con-Fest launch film, I am working to involve academics, activists, artists, creators, and authorities in an innovative event that will showcase the cultural dimensions of Dakar and Senegal.

Participants will discover the long-standing relations between Senegal and Asian countries. Such connections have been strong since the Bandung Conference, where Jean Roux, political advisor to President Senghor, represented Senegal in 1955. Senegal has always had very close relations with Asian countries, particularly those in the Middle East, because of its religious ties with the Gulf states. These strong relations with Asian countries were initiated by President Senghor, who always defended the Non-Aligned Movement and supported the countries of Southeast Asia. This diplomatic tradition has been strengthened by his successors, who have increased the number of partnerships between Asian countries and Senegal in a number of areas, to the point where giants of the Asian car industry (e.g., Tata and SenIran) have set up operations in Senegal. India's cinema has entered every household in Senegal, especially during its golden age: There is no Senegalese from the 1960s-1980s who did not know any Indian music, particularly music films from Bombay/Mumbai.

Moreover, an Asia-Africa meeting without mentioning the city of "Pikine" would be a great mistaken. Pikine is a suburb in Dakar, and it is well known among fans and dance bands as the heart of Indian music and films in the city. Today, China has become Senegal's major trading and infrastructure partner, with China building major cultural infrastructures like The Grand Theatre and The Museum of Black Civilizations. In 2022, as part of the Dakar Contemporary Arts Biennial, which is one of the largest cultural events in Senegal, the Chinese pavilion received 12 Chinese artists around the theme of *Active Transition*.

Korea and Japan are supporting Senegal in education and vocational training. We cannot talk about the Asian influence in Senegal without mentioning the practice of martials arts, which has created links between Senegalese practitioners of the sport and the countries of origin for these martials arts. The first encounters between Senegal and Asia took place through Senegalese veterans returning from the Indochinese war (1946-1954) with Indochinese and Vietnamese wives. Senegalese of Asian descent are among the oldest "Métis" communities in Senegal.

The Dakar Con-Fest will be an opportunity for us to show the exchanges that have existed – and that continue to exist – between Asian countries and Senegal in many domains: cuisine, sports, clothing, cinema, religious practices, the arts, health and wellness practices, languages, and more. The 2025 Africa-Asia conference in Dakar will be a great celebration of art and knowledge for a new South-South axis of disobedience thinking.

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The Ta-u and Their Island Home

Annika Pissin, Huei-Min Tsai and Eric Clark

Pongso no Ta-u, 'island of humans' (Lanyu, Orchid Island), is a small volcanic island to the southeast of Taiwan and north of the Batanes Islands (Philippines). Protected for centuries by coral reefs, rumours, and remoteness, at the edge of Chinese and Japanese empires, the Ta-u (also called Yami) have only recently, in the process of becoming modern under Taiwanese rule, been engulfed in the currents of capitalist economies. This Focus section brings together personal stories that reflect how being Ta-u is rapidly changing. Each highlights challenges to the integrity of Ta-u culture, as well as the resilience of Ta-u people.

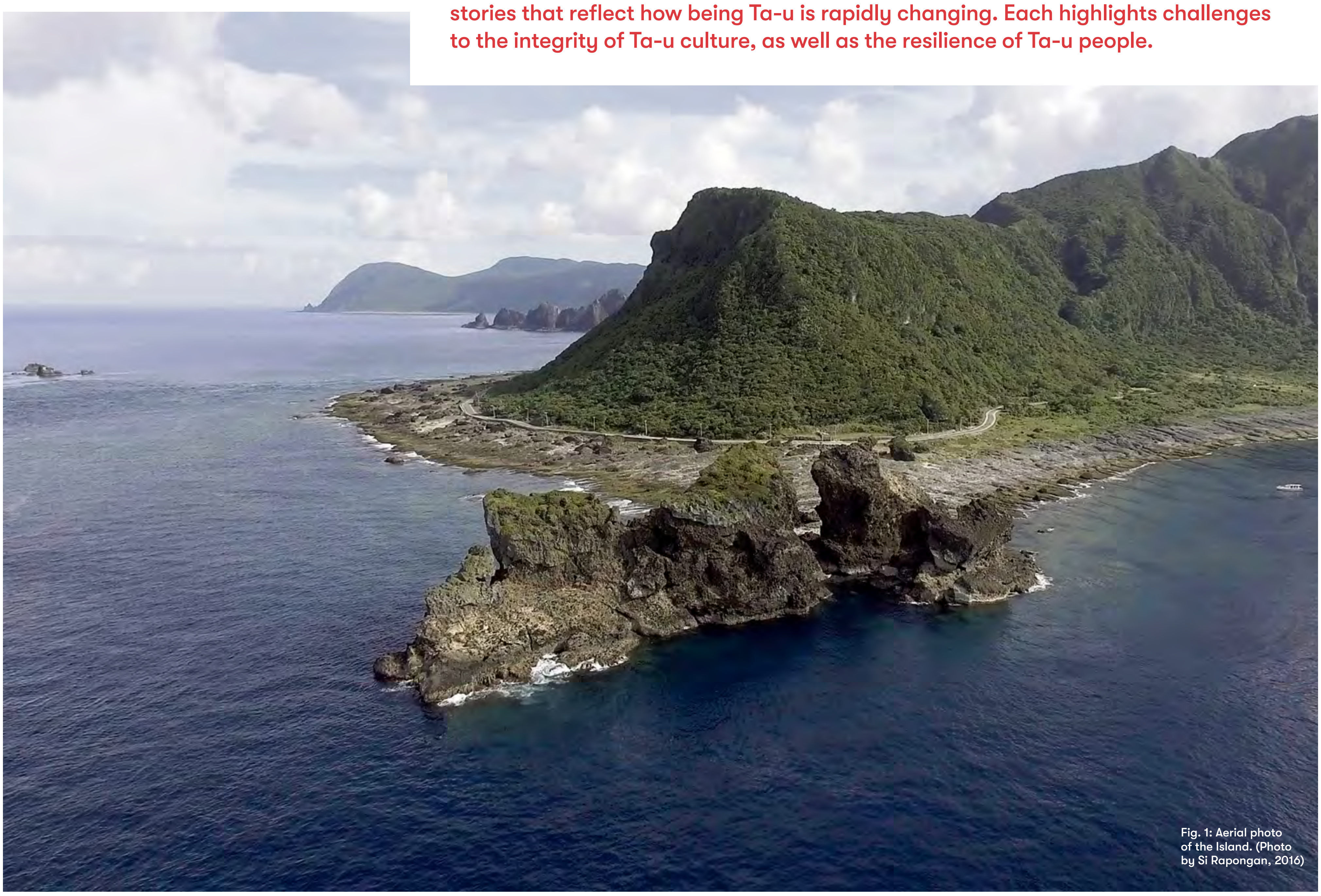

Fig. 1: Aerial photo of the Island. (Photo by Si Rapongan, 2016)

The island of Pongso no Ta-u consists mostly of tropical forested mountains with several peaks over 400 meters, the highest over 500 meters. Six settlements are situated on coastal alluvial plains. For centuries, the Ta-u have wet cultivated taro, the main staple in their diet. Wet cultivation is based on the accumulated landesque capital of previous generations in the form of irrigation channels and walled wet fields, carefully maintained and occasionally expanded. Yams, dry taro, millet, and sweet potato, as well as fruits and vegetables, are grown in small hillside patches. Fish is the main source of protein; pigs, chickens and goats are eaten primarily in connection with rituals and festivities. The Ta-u are widely known for their fishing boats of various sizes. The Ta-u calendar is divided into three seasons: flying fish season, after flying fish season, and before flying fish season. Gathering shellfish along the shore and spear fishing are other common food provisioning practices. The Ta-u may eat over 100 kinds of fish during a year, but the most significant fish is the flying fish, which come in abundance between February and June.

History

On a clear day, from atop a peak of Pongso no Ta-u, you can see Taiwan to the west and the northernmost islands of the Batanes Archipelago to the south. While the oceanic conditions are challenging, especially crossing the Bashi Channel, we can assume that the early inhabitants of these islands were related and included in each other's mental maps. Ta-u creation myths, with considerable variations among villages, continue to be told, though with gradually weakening social function. Anthropological and linguistic evidence of their origins consistently paints a picture of roots in and migration from the Batanes Islands. Ta-u is a Batanic language, a subgroup of Malayo-Polynesian languages distinct from all Austronesian languages spoken by Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan. A commonly held understanding is that the Ta-u came to the island from the Batanes Islands, perhaps seven to eight centuries ago. They have since maintained contacts across the Bashi Channel, albeit with considerable hiatuses.

Archeological evidence, on the other hand, suggests human habitation and material flows from Taiwan dating back at least 12 centuries, with more recent analyses indicating settlement as far back as 2500 BP.[1] Recent genetic research shows that the Ta-u have more roots among Indigenous groups in Taiwan than in the Batanes, and that the Ta-u are genetically unusually homogenous, due to long periods of relative isolation associated with 'bottleneck events.' It also confirmed oral history that some families are closely related with the Batanes.[2]

All in all, with considerable but decreasing degrees of uncertainty, the view of human history on Pongso no Ta-u is one of long periods of isolation, contributing to genetic and cultural homogeneity, with occasional disruptions such as migration from the Batanes Islands resulting in displacement or replacement of language and culture. Traces of prior languages retained in Ta-u support this view. The village communities with which Ta-u kinship groups primarily identify display substantial variation. Isolated over the long run, the Ta-u have developed a wealth of knowledge and practices for living sustainably on their island home.

Under Japanese rule (1895-1945), the island's first police station was established in 1903, then the first school in 1923, and a second school in 1932. Isolation came to a definitive end when Taiwan and its adjacent islands came under the rule of the Republic of China in 1945. The Ta-u experienced dramatic escalation of colonial activities, including: land dispossessions (1951); establishment of a large prison, primarily for political dissidents (1952-1979), as well as ten 'veteran farms' (1958-1991), which together nearly doubled the population; topocide /domicide of traditional villages, replaced with poor quality cement houses (1966-1980); development of exploitative tourism (since 1970s); strip-logging nearly one-third of the island's forests (1970s); nuclear waste storage, which remains a contested practice (launched in 1973, storage since 1982, new shipments discontinued 1996); and over-fishing near the island during flying fish season (contested in 1990s and 2000s).

Names, transcriptions, and translations

Pongso no Ta-u has historically gone by several names. The Ta-u call it *Irala*, which means 'land' in the sense of navigational direction, where one lands, facing the mountain; or *Pongso no Ta-u*, island of the people. The two Taiwanese Indigenous groups, the Puyuma and the Ami, call it *Botol* and *Buturu*. The Japanese named the island *Tabako Shima* on a map from 1607. The Chinese named it *Hongdou yu* (Red Bean Islet) in 1618 and later incorporated it into Hengchun County in 1877. It is said that the peaks of the island reflect a reddish hue at sunset. Subsequently it was most widely known in the West as *Botel Tobago*.

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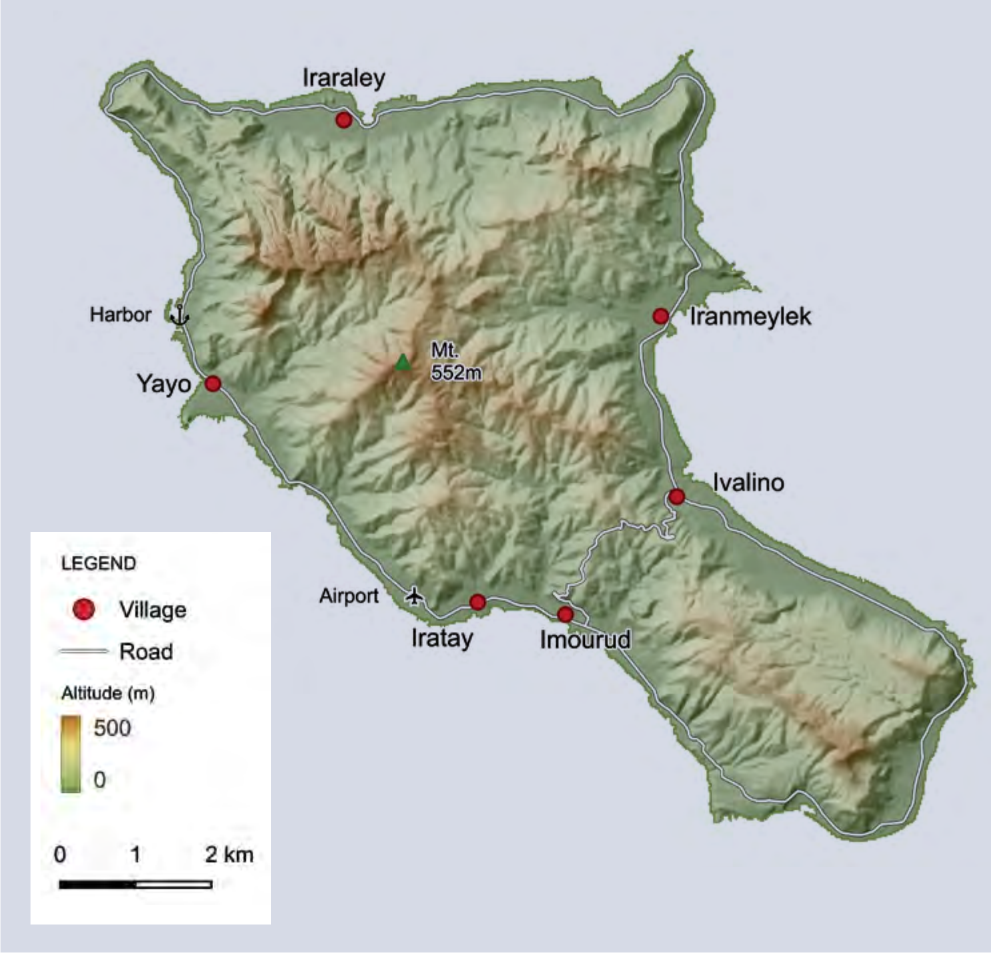

Fig. 2 (above): Map of Pongso no Ta-u. (Map by Cheng-Jhe Lee, 2024)

During the Japanese occupation, the island was called *Kotosho* (Red Head Islet), modifying the Chinese name. And in 1947 it was officially named *Lanyu* (Orchid Island) by the Republic of China, to celebrate its bounty of moth orchids.

The Japanese anthropologist Ryūzō Torii, the first of many to study the Ta-u, reportedly asked the islanders the name of their 'tribe' in 1897 and was told 'Yami.' Although this was possibly a mistake (*yami* means 'we'), it stuck well, especially in the anthro-pological and linguistic literature of the 20th century, but has been disputed by many islanders who associate the name with Japanese rule. The name Yami, however, may not have been a mistake, since it also means 'north,' and they were called Yami by their Batanes neighbours to the south. Aware that outsiders referred to them as Yami, they may have meant this in answering Torii's question. A recent review of ethnographic research on Ta-u ethnonyms confirms that the group historically called themselves Ta-u. Today, roughly a third prefer the name Yami, while a bit over half prefer Ta-u (in various transcriptions). Some who prefer Yami consider Ta-u to be too broad, encompassing all of mankind. Both names occur in the Focus articles.[3]

The Ta-u language is primarily oral and has only recently become transcribed in Latin alphabetic form. There are no established 'correct' spellings, and transcriptions of the oral language vary both in the literature and among the Ta-u: for instance, Ta-u, Tao, Ta-wu, Dawu, Dao.

Inevitably, problems arise in translating concepts and place names from oral Ta-u into written Chinese characters and finally into written English. Place names in Ta-u describe the place well, including what is appropriate or inappropriate to do there. These meanings get lost and thereby overlooked by Taiwanese tourist agents and tourists, putting their customers and themselves at risk by not understanding the full significance of place names.

One especially important Ta-u concept is *ili* ('village'), commonly translated to Chinese as *'buluo'* (部落), which in English would be translated as 'tribe.' Each village name denotes not only a place, but a kinship that maintains its own culture of stories, beliefs, local knowledge, practices, and even architecture, distinct from while overlapping with those of other *ili*. In our translations of the articles, we use 'village' to denote the meaning of *ili*, allowing the names of villages to denote both the place and the people, kin, who live there.

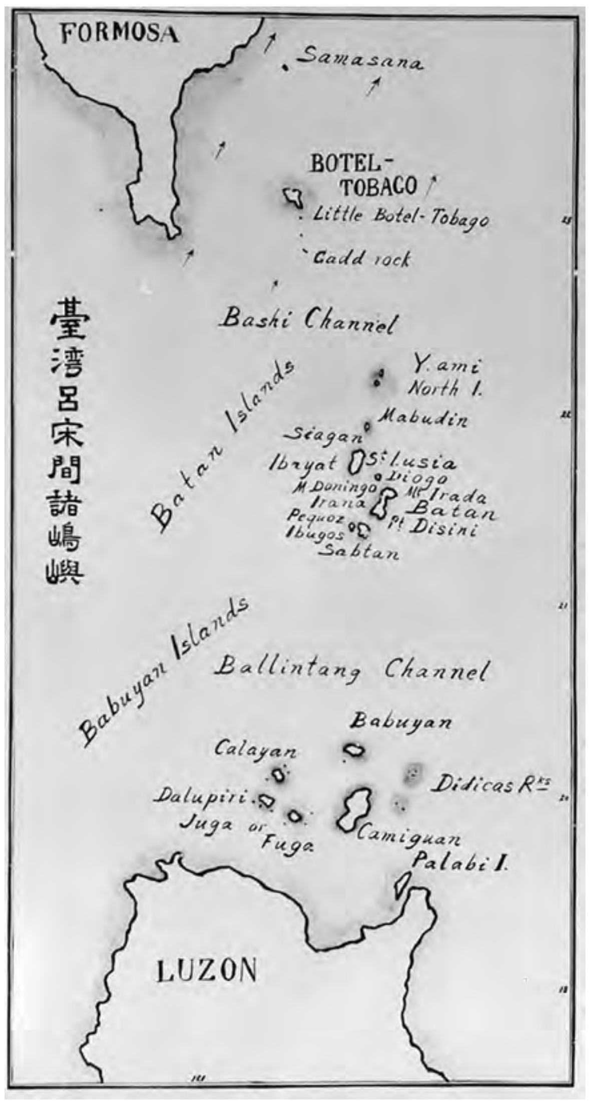

Fig. 3 (above): Map of Botel Tobago (Orchid Island), 1898, by anthropologist Torii Ryūzō (1870-1953). (Image from digital archive of the University of Tokyo. Public Domain.)

Knowledge and language

In the first essay of this Focus section, Syaman Rapongan – award-winning author of novels and short stories, anti-nuclear waste activist, boat builder, and fisher – takes us to the first encounter with the Island of the Ta-u: the beach. We learn that the beach is more than just a space where land meets ocean. It is a place embodying the spiritual significance of rituals, as well as a "theatre of action" where many of the most vital activities of the Ta-u are performed. With few words, Rapongan poetically conveys images of essential elements of Ta-u knowledge, culture, and relations with the ocean, flying fish, and the island's ecology. He tells of the salient connections between the mountains, the ocean, and the people, by way of providing timber for the boats, soil, and fresh running water for the taro and other fruits of the forests, as well as a home for the goats and pigs.

Syaman Rapongan equates university disciplines like meteorology, oceanography, and ecology to Ta-u traditional knowledge of the winds, currents, waves, and relationships between land and sea. This knowledge is deeply rooted in how the Ta-u relate with the mountains and the ocean. His essay signals what is to come in the following essays, reverberating insights into fundamental differences between capitalist and Indigenous cultures in their relationships with nature.

Ta-u account for over 80 percent of the island's population. But the schooling of this population is geared for assimilation into Taiwanese culture and society, through the classroom language of instruction as well as the provisioning of school meals, as emphasised by Syamen Womzas' article. He enthusiastically develops a complementary curriculum including supplementary school books for teaching elementary school children about various aspects of their natural and cultural milieu. He also works for changing food provisioning at school, including engaging children and their families in planting and harvesting traditional dry cultivated roots.

Knowledge is of great importance to all of the authors. Traditional Ta-u knowledge and loss of knowledge associated with the introduction of new ways of life, economic relations, convenient technologies, relations with nature, and conceptions of the world, are themes that reappear in the essays. Some emphasise the tragic loss of traditional knowledge, others the creative efforts to preserve, adapt, and develop that knowledge. Together they ask us to regard scientific knowledge as one way – among others – of knowing and appreciating the world. The science and knowledge of the Ta-u is also taught, studied, learned, transmitted, and, in its openness to change, enhanced. Stemming from deep relational insights, it is not so much subordinate to as different from dominant academic knowledge.

Traditional Ta-u knowledge is preserved in the Ta-u language and can only be kept alive by being active, in motion. If an activity is discontinued, the experience goes extinct. Extinction of experience involves "the radical loss of the direct contact and hands-on interaction with the surrounding environment that traditionally comes through subsistence and other daily life activities."[4] Tending taro fields, for instance, requires an abundance of direct contact and hands-on interaction with the surrounding environment, a taste of which we get in Sinan Lamuran's and Sinan Yongala's essays. If a field lies fallow, for example, because the woman that tended it works in Taiwan or is otherwise busy in the new tourism economy of the island, her family will have to buy taro from Taiwan for ceremonial festivities. With the fallow field comes loss of the language and the practice of praising taro, an important part of the boat launch ceremony. With discontinued hands-on interaction in the taro field comes loss of immediate contact with the land, which can then more easily turn into an accountable commodity, passing from the practice of commoning to exchange on a market as private property.

Land, state, and capital

The collision between Ta-u and Taiwanese cultures is most glaring in the nexus of land, state, and capital. Ta-u relations with nature, mode of governance, and principles of economic integration could hardly be more opposite to those brought to the island under Taiwanese rule. The Ta-u relate with nature as a sacred whole that they are part of, in the same egalitarian communal way they relate with each other in work, decision-making, and sharing. In Taiwan, capitalist and patriarchic relations determine that nature is valued as resource commodities, while economic integration takes place primarily through markets, backed by a heavy-handed state.

Already in 1951, Taiwan legislated a transfer of Ta-u common land to 'public land' and instituted a land registry for 'private property.' With the stroke of a pen, and the power to do so, 99.5 percent of the island became 'public land' that the state could do with as it saw fit. And that it did.

For the Ta-u, "Trees are the children of the mountain; boats are the grandchildren of the sea. All living things in Nature have a soul."[5] When a tree is taken to build boats, Ta-u men sing their praise, respect, and gratitude, and talk with the tree as they cut it down and chip away at the trunk to carve out parts for the boat. In contrast, the Taiwanese state summarily deemed the forest too diverse with predominantly 'worthless' species, strip-logged large swaths, and replaced the 'children of the mountain' with fast-growing and invasive Australian Pine and White Popinac. Years later, the same state authority reported that the project failed to produce an economically viable forest.

Similarly, Ta-u relate with the soil, the water coming down the mountain, the taro, sweet potato, millet, and other plants they tend in the fields and gardens. These are all spirited beings with whom they live in a relation of sacred interdependence. The Taiwan Veteran Affairs Commission, on the other hand, grabbed over one-fifth of the island's arable land to establish ten farms (1958-1991) that served as labor camps for about 1000 convicts under the guard of army veterans. Additional Ta-u land was grabbed for building the prison, accommodations, and service buildings. This had severe consequences for the Ta-u, not only in terms of having to buy food to compensate for the loss, but in terms of loss of connections with the land they had become part of, and which had become part of them.

Robin Wall Kimmerer echoes many an Indigenous voice across recent centuries when she observes that "to the settler mind, land was property, real estate, capital, or natural resources. But to our people, it was everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us. Our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground."[6]

Land, tourism, and waste

The Ta-u have complex land rights customs spanning ocean, beach, settlement and forest, a dozen specific land uses, and five ownership types.[7] Until recently, none of these involved money when land was transferred between users, be they individuals, families or communities. But the invasive species of money has for decades been seeping into Ta-u life as Taiwanese capital scrutinises the landscape for 'investment opportunities,' opening up channels for extraction of value wherever land is 'under-utilised' and potential land rents and returns on investment can be found. Several authors mention the way conforming to money – letting go of alternative relations deeply embedded in Ta-u culture – has become a necessity. Nowhere has this been channeled so effectively, with such profound impact, as in the tourism industry, now the primary source of revenues in the local economy.

Syaman Lamuran gives a concise overview of the development of tourism on Pongso no Ta-u since the late 1960s. Slowly, the Ta-u villages have managed to turn the tide and gain control over the characteristics of tourism, including ownership and

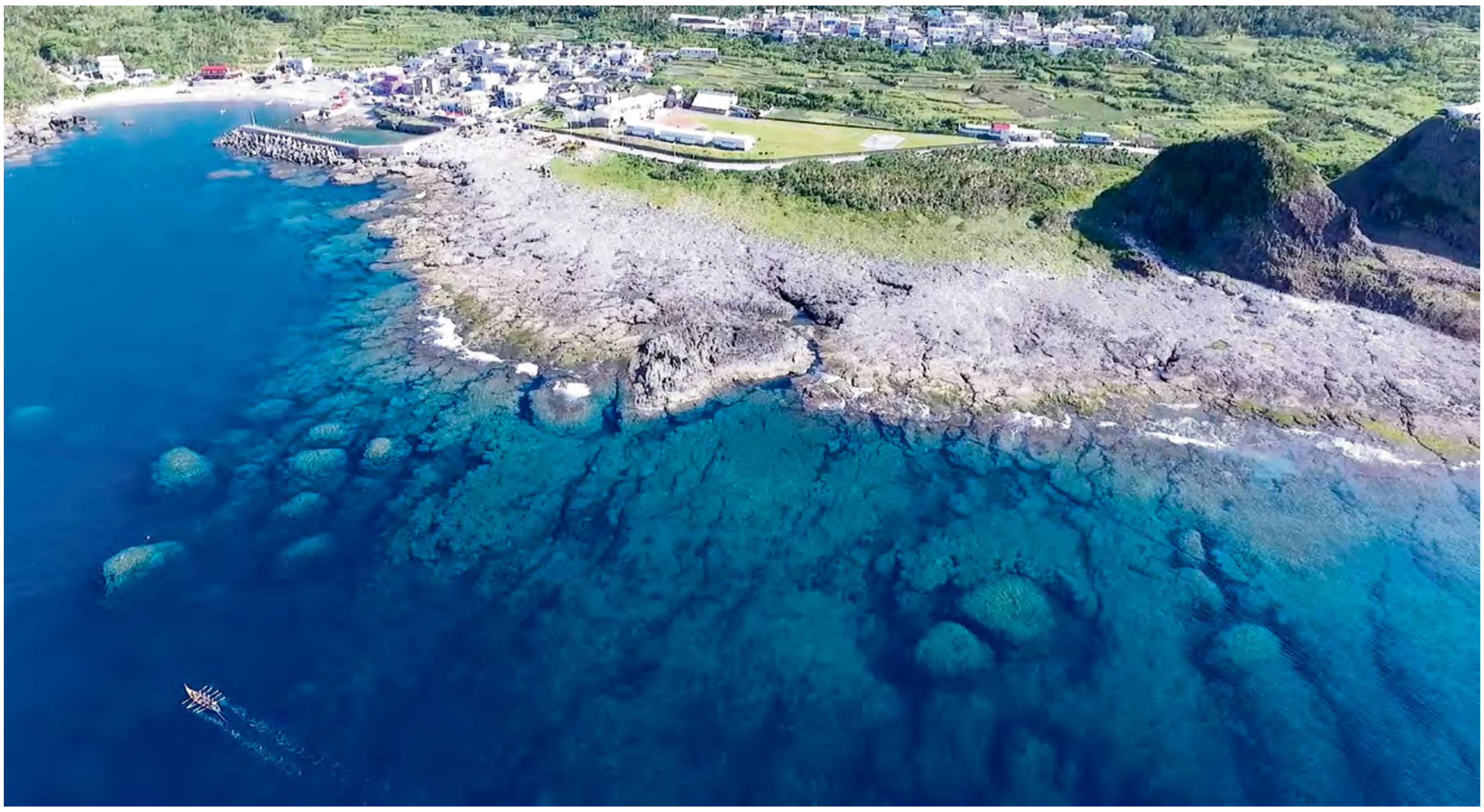

Fig. 4 (right): Coral reef coast and a boat rowing. (Photo by Si Rapongan, 2016)

Fig. 5 (below): Vanuwa. The beach where elders gather and share knowledge with the young. (Photo by Huei-Min Tsai, 2013)

management, qualities of activities, and educating tourists in ways that enhance the experience, for tourists and for the Ta-u people. But there remain problems and issues. In several villages there are instances of Taiwanese getting Ta-u people to sign lease contracts on land for investing in various tourism businesses. Because the land is not privately owned by individuals and is not on any market, these have been the source of much tension and suffering in some families and communities, who should have been party to the decision. Some contracts are disadvantageous for the Ta-u by covering many years without any clause on renewal and adjustment of lease fee. The most publicised case, the Mori incident, concerned a lease with the local government for establishing a cement factory.[8]

Another major concern with the flourishing of tourism, highlighted by Syaman Lamuran, is the issue of waste, as tourism accounts for massive volumes of material flows to the island. Sinan Hana writes that the beach is like a furniture store, where you can find useful things like a table. Everything has its use. In one of the Ta-u origin myths, as retold in a children's book, "the bamboo man and the stone man gave all the people their most solemn advice, 'no matter what you do, do not waste anything. Use only those resources that you need and do not spoil anything that the creator has given to us.'"[9]

The problem now is that the volume of waste flooding the island is more than the Ta-u can feasibly make use of, as evident in the growing garbage disposal site south of Imourud. In just the month of June 2019, tourism left 1284 tons of garbage on the island. It is transported to Taitung and from there to Kaohsiung.[10] To understand the proportions: this small island with roughly 5000 residents received over 150,000 tourists per year in 2022 and 2023, peaking at about 30,000 in the month of June.[11] Lack of sewage treatment infrastructure combined with rapid increase in sewage volume and chemical pollutants is a ticking bomb. Sinan Lamuran explains that it is no longer advisable to cultivate land below the level of settlements.

Navigating a future

The contributions in this special section convey Ta-u determination and resilience. Si Rapongan follows in the footsteps of Syaman Rapongan in maintaining the Ta-u boat building and fishing culture. Syamen Womzas, Sinan Lamuran, and Sinan Yongala express determination to steward Ta-u food culture into the future. Sinan Hana creatively develops Ta-u architecture and inspires others to follow suit. Syaman Lamuran navigates the Ta-u path towards sustainable small-scale island tourism, benevolently soft towards Ta-u nature and culture. They represent many other Ta-u people struggling to be Ta-u and modern. In September 2024, a 20-person, 12-meter-long boat built of 22 pieces of different tree species will be rowed to the Batanes Islands, reports Si Maraos, director of Indigenous Peoples Cultural Foundation – one of many efforts to keep Ta-u culture alive and flourishing.[12]

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Eric Clark is professor emeritus at Lund University. His research interests include political economy, political ecology, island development, sustainability and degrowth, gentrification, financialisation, and critical agrarian and food studies. He is currently a novice in the art of beekeeping. Email: eric.clark@keg.lu.se

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[12] Eric Clark gratefully acknowledges a travel grant from The Royal Society of Letters, Lund, Sweden.

Vanuwa – Beach

Syaman Rapongan

The English translation of *vanuwa* – beach – does not capture all that *vanuwa* is, accommodates, makes, facilitates, connects. *Vanuwa* revolves around a pillar of Ta-u culture: flying fish. But it is also a community centre, where teaching, learning, meeting, observing, conversing, and ceremonial thanksgiving and sharing take place. *Vanuwa*, on this island in the Pacific Ocean, is very different from what we commonly understand as a beach.

The geographical space of the beach in front of each Ta-u village has multiple, substantial symbolic and cultural meanings. *Vanuwa* means theater of action. Its original practical meaning refers to the multiple cultural aspects of the traditional wooden boats central to Flying Fish Mythology and the Ritual of Summoning Flying Fish. The ceremonial festival to welcome the arrival of flying fish is held on the *vanuwa* during late winter and early spring. The Jimasik village (commonly known as Small Ba-Dai Bay) is often the first, with other villages in close succession.

At the time when the people of Jimasik village migrated to Imourud village, a man called Si Gayong built a settlement in gratitude to the gods who had cared for him and extended his life. Another man called Si Zivu built a house and performed a Purification Ceremony by wringing out the juice of sugarcane before moving in. Together, they also created the ceremony of Ancestor Worship Day, held on the *vanuwa* in autumn.

To put it simply, the original cultural significance of the *vanuwa* is a sacred space of religious activities at the seashore. But it also serves as the spatial concept of facing the sea with one's back to the mountain. To care for the beach is to hold *mivanuwa*. This means to tidy up the beach environment and make it clean for the sake of visual pleasure. It also expresses wishes to the *kakavag* (fishing groups, a key social unit for the Ta-u) for safe fishing, and for safe departure from and return to the sacred scene of the *vanuwa*, especially during the initial phase of flying fish activities. It is a cyclical annual ritual, welcoming a new year.

Thus we can understand the special spatial meaning of *vanuwa*. It is the place where the ceremony of Summoning Flying Fish is held. The doctrine of oceanography taught by the elders, based on Flying Fish Mythology, determines the cyclical ecology of catching marine fish. The season to catch flying fish runs roughly from February until June, during which time there is a ban on hunting fish among the coral reefs. Subsequently, from July until November, Ta-u can catch fish among the coral reefs, during which there is a taboo against hunting flying fish and ghost-headed swordfish.

With this kind of ancient knowledge of the original Indigenous people, elders meet at the *vanuwa* to discuss not only fishing, but also farming, as well as the construction, maintenance, and renovation of the common ditches for irrigation and drainage. So were the matters of this original and simple society established, and *vanuwa* became, in reality as well as in name, the venue for ritual ceremonies and the core of the spatial field.

At the same time, the wider meaning of *vanuwa* lies in exploring changes in the cosmos and in the layers of clouds across ever-shifting seasons, as well as the names of the sixteen winds. The names of these winds (meteorology) are mainly based on the relationship between *ilawud* (northeast wind), *avalat* (southwest wind), *pangalitan* (east wind), *kanmunwan* (west wind), and other winds. The relations between the south and north winds, and the left and right winds (not east and west) directly determine changes on the ocean surface, in currents and waves. Together, this comprises the traditional oceanographic and meteorological knowledge of the islanders concerning the ocean and the skies.

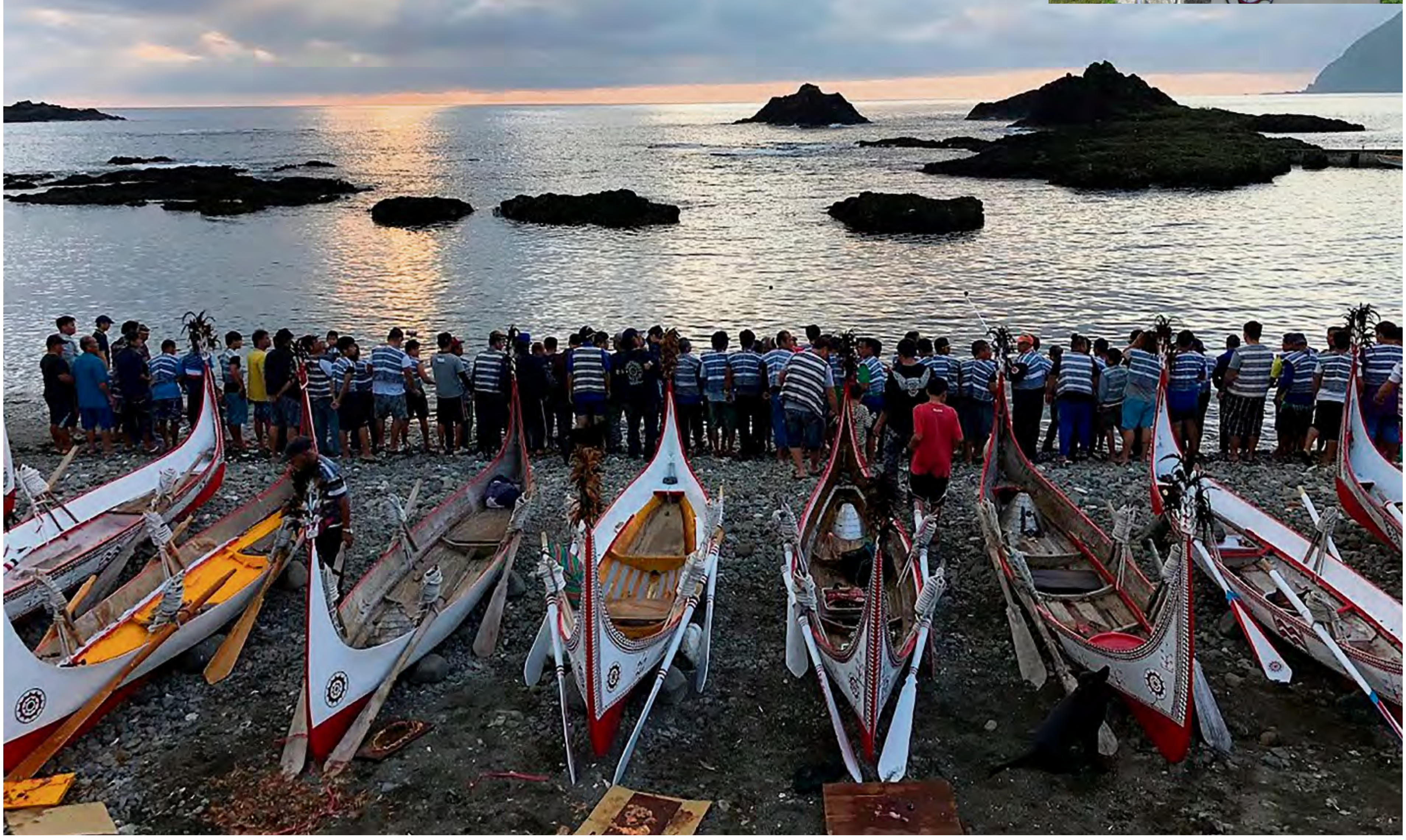
Vanuwa connects to the water world of the ocean in yet another sense: the fishing and hunting relationships that extend from the beach to the horizon of the sea, and the labour relationships that connect the Indigenous people with the hill ecology, which is the source of the boats. Also, for the Indigenous children, who become intimate with the sea from early childhood, *vanuwa* is the source of knowledge, such as the names of fish and the relationships between the moon and the tides. Moreover, in each of the six villages – Imourud, Iratay, Yayo, Iraraley, Iranmeylek, Ivalino – the amount of flotsam and jetsam observed on the *vanuwa* during the flying fish season is considered evidence to estimate the amount of flying fish.

While we continue to understand the beaches as sacred places for the religious ceremonies of the oceanic people of the island, their spatial essence and symbolic significance have been weakened with the invasion of modern foreign civilizations. The shared understanding of terms such as *ilawud* (distant ocean), *irala* (nearshore), and the names of the winds is already vanished knowledge. After all, the accuracy of modern meteorological reports from the Weather Bureau, and the offshore fishery map of Taiwan available on everyone's cell phone, have definitely weakened the transmission of the original knowledge of the island's oceanic people. We currently stand in the unequivocal position of being the only oceanic people in Taiwan. I feel an obligation to preserve and disseminate this original knowledge, currently in the process of being forgotten.

Fig. 1 (below): Summoning flying fish on Iranmeylek beach. (Photo by Syaman Lamuran, 2022)

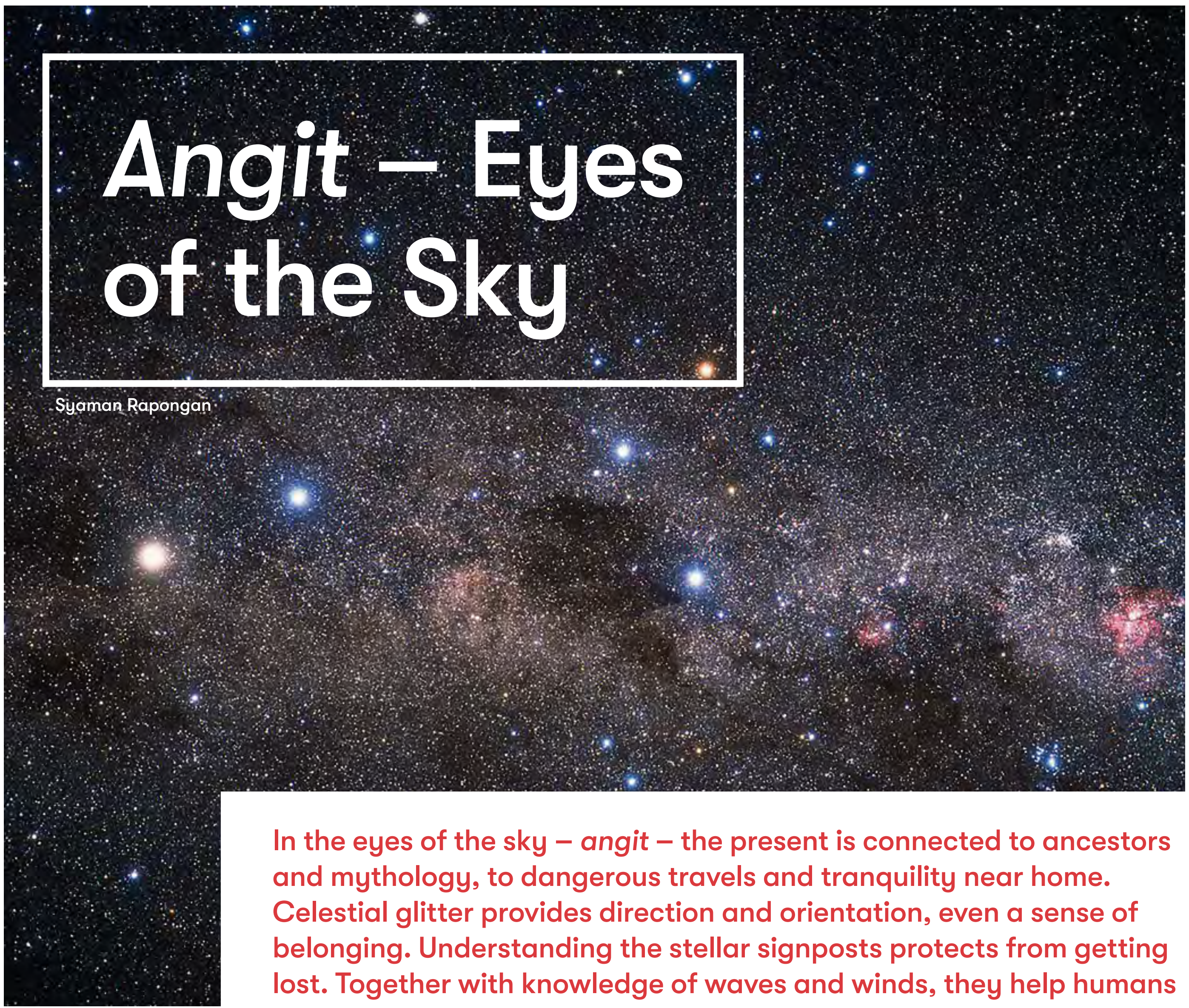
Fig. 2 (inset): Village sign for Imourud. (Photo by Huei-Min Tsai, 2023)

IMOUROD
紅頭部落



Angit – Eyes of the Sky

Syaman Rapongan



In the eyes of the sky – *angit* – the present is connected to ancestors and mythology, to dangerous travels and tranquility near home. Celestial glitter provides direction and orientation, even a sense of belonging. Understanding the stellar signposts protects from getting lost. Together with knowledge of waves and winds, they help humans stay alive in small boats on the ocean. In the end, angit also connects to hope and faith in future generations.

My community, Imourud, is now called Hongtou (Red Head). Before the people of my community moved to Imourud, they were called Jimasik (where they lived before the move), which means "small plain with abundant water." I do not know if it was 400 or 500 years ago, but there was a family in Jimasik called the Left Side Family. In that family was an elder called Lefty (Syapen Mawuzi). One day he went up the mountain to gather firewood. From the top of the mountain, gazing far out to the southern horizon, he saw two small islands. Then, at night, he looked up at the starry sky and studied how it changed. Three years later, he organised a family boat team to row south. This journey, made by the Left Side Family of Jimasik, is the earliest known travel in the history of the island of Pongso no Ta-u.

Landing on the island of Itbayat, they unexpectedly discovered that the language of the Ivatan people in the Batanes archipelago was similar to that of the Ta-u people so far to the north. This surprised them immensely. Lefty's family worked diligently to learn the configurations of the stars in order to use them as coordinates for the return journey. Before leaving Itbayat Island, Lefty wanted to find a wife for his eldest son. This was also one of the inducements for the southward voyage – to establish a good marriage relationship so as to facilitate barter trade between the north and south islands. In the end, Lefty achieved his wish, and his eldest son married the eldest daughter of a family on Itbayat. Decades later, the accomplishment of the north-south voyage led to a blossoming of knowledge about constellations of stars and planets: *mina morong* (North Star), *mina mahabteng* (Pisces), *minei singa* (Southern Cross), *sasadangen* (Scorpio), *masen* (Andromeda), *nozayin* (Vega), *minei keteh* (Orion), *mapatolaw so araw* (Jupiter).

Later, when his eldest son decided to travel south, he relied on the constellations *minei singa* (Southern Cross) to the southeast and *mina morong* (Polaris) to the north of Pongso no Ta-u as his coordinates, and thus the peoples of the north and south began to trade back and forth. *Mina mahabteng* (Pisces), *masen* (Andromeda), and *nozayin* (Weaver), which appear or disappear in different seasons, are the constellations that can be trusted in the middle segment of the voyage. *Minei keteh* (Orion), which symbolises the three oceanic brothers, means a "seafaring team with a shared fate." The brothers represent forces joined in unity. *Mapasdep so araw* (Arcturus, or Great Horn) and *mapatolaw so araw* (Jupiter) are the planet constellations that distinguish the beginning of the evening and the morning light. Finally, the Jimasik found that when the *sasadangen* (Scorpion) had many asteroids in its tail, the schools of flying fish would be large, while the schools of other coral reef and bottom-dwelling fish would be relatively small.

Today I am perhaps the last of the Ta-u familiar with this kind of Indigenous knowledge of the stars for navigation. In recent years, I have been training my son to go up into the mountain forest to cut down trees for boat building, and teaching him about the different trees and plants for boat building. This kind of local, practical knowledge of life is, of course, something that we cannot learn in our Taiwanese schools, while speaking Mandarin Chinese. This is the knowledge of the world's borderlands, which is to say the knowledge of the forgotten regions.

I think it is the greatest happiness of my life to be raised in a family that enjoys telling legendary stories. After we finished our father-son boat, we went out at night to catch flying fish. Father and son waited for the flying fish to pierce the fish net; the night sea was silent, to our ears' delight. At the same time, we frequently looked up to the starry sky's eyes to pass the time. This was another kind of unspeakable joy that the plank boat had brought to us as father and son, and it was a source of intimacy in our father-son relationship.

In 2005 I was honoured with what had been the wish and dream of my life: to travel the seas on a large ship. I had always thought of this oceanic adventure in literary terms – of myself as an adventurous sea traveller. When I think about it now, it was indeed a truly adventurous sojourn on the ocean. The Japanese captain of the ship, Ryozo Yamamoto, was a man who loved adventures, and I later realised that I risked my life to accompany this noble son playing games with the stormy waves and strong winds. From Makassar on Sulawesi, the ship crossed the equator northward to Kota Manado, and then sailed eastward through the equatorial latitudes to Jayapura, the easternmost city in Indonesia, a voyage of nearly 1000 nautical miles. The most obvious navigational constellation of this trip was the Southern Cross. The most dangerous sea journey was between Sulawesi and the Northern Maluku Archipelago, where we couldn't see a single island for six days and nights: no GPS, no SOS emergency signal, no traffic lights to identify the ship at night. Apart from the Southern Cross, I had a sixth sense for orientation, as if my family's ancestral spirit was accompanying me on my voyage so that I could arrive safely at my destination, Jayapura, a city whose Christian inhabitants belong to one of Papua New Guinea's numerous Indigenous groups.

Except for navigators in Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia, and a few other islands in the North and South Pacific Ocean, who remain passionate about cross-island voyages guided by the stars, navigation by constellations has been forgotten, even in the Caribbean Sea and places such as Pongso no Ta-u and the Batanes Islands. GPS technology has replaced the knowledge of the constellations that guided seafarers during the great age of voyages. Navigation by constellations has been reduced to a romanticised recreational side course of oceanographic studies.

How did the well-known ancient East-West Eurasian Silk Road start? How did the desert and grassland nomadic peoples, river peoples of the Amazon, oceanic islanders, ice peoples of Europe, Asia, and America, as well as those caught up in the 'Age of Discovery,' move and migrate without losing their direction? Now it appears obvious that the stars of the universe and the direction of sun and moon provide basic points of orientation for humans to observe, study, and utilise for travel. But countless human lives have been lost in the process of getting lost. It was only thanks to the gradual verification of knowledge of the stars – the 'eyes of the sky' – that they could avoid getting lost.

Nowadays, when people of various ethnic groups drive in major cities (other kinds of planets), or drive on long trips, GPS replaces the human brain. Technology replaces the regional wisdom and knowledge of astral relations underlying celestially piloted adventures. As far as I am concerned, I may be a 'primitive' boat builder. I row my boat and catch flying fish at night. You, on the other hand, are probably distant from such knowledge and can only remotely understand that such things are not easy. If I may say so, what I have done, including nautical adventures, is more difficult to write about than a novelist's fictionalizations of all sorts of drama.

The most beautiful places in nature are characterised by wild openness and unpolished original beauty. Maybe there are no man-made traffic lights on the oceans, on the ice fields, or in the deserts, but such landscapes have their own traffic lights: those of the winds, the clouds, the rains, the sunshine, the moonlight, and the waves. People may rely on GPS, but the stars of the universe and the Earth's spaces teeming with life have not at all lost their charm just because there is science and technology. On the contrary, the Celestial Maidens in the sky laugh at the arrogance of mankind.

The purpose of rowing my son's and my boat at night to catch flying fish is actually to implore the eyes of the sky – *angit* – for romantic thoughts.

Syaman Rapongan lives in Imourud. He fishes, builds boats, and writes about conflicts between Ta-u traditions and modernity in daily life. He is the best-known writer of oceanic literature in Taiwan. His work has been translated into English and French, and he has won many awards, including the National Award of Art and Literature in 2023. A decade ago, he established the Island Indigenous Science Studio, IISS, dedicated to preserving and promoting the rich knowledge and cultural heritage of the Ta-u.
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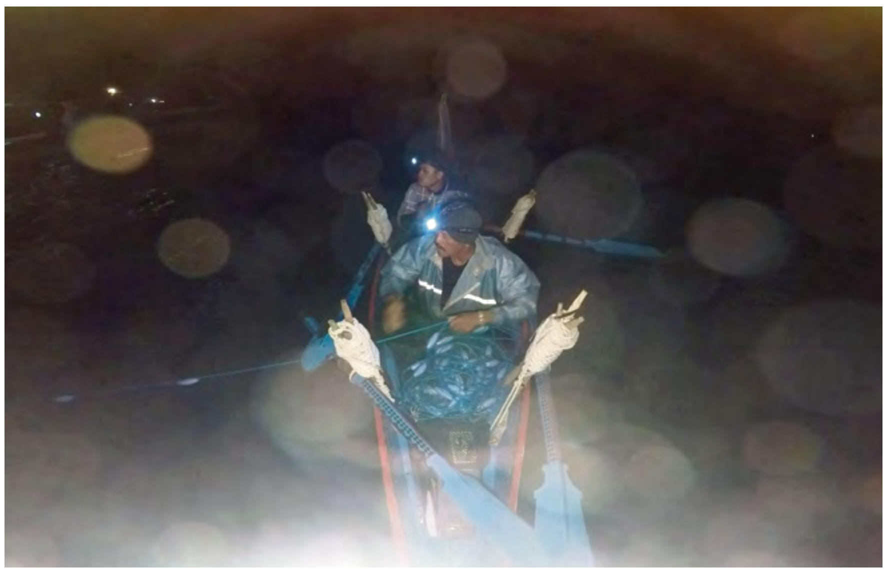


Fig. 3 (top): The Southern Cross. (Photo by A. Fujii, used under a Creative Commons license courtesy of European Southern Observatory)

Fig. 4 (above): Syaman Rapongan and Si Rapongan go out fishing in the dark. (Photo courtesy of Si Rapongan, 2021)

Tatala – Small Boat

Si Rapongan

The wish to build a traditional plank boat, with all the knowledge, skill, and hard work this entails, is challenged by what money can buy in the age of fast motorboats. But these are not equivalents. Building a Ta-u boat, one's own or a shared boat, is a source of joy and esteem for a Ta-u man. The boathouses protect these assemblages of wealth, allowing them to live longer, to catch more fish, and to save more trees.

When I was a child, I used to go to the beach to participate in the annual Summoning of the Flying Fish festival. At that time, each family had their own lashed-lug plank boat or *tatala*, a small vessel for one or two scullers, used primarily in nearshore waters. Families would sit next to their boat at the ceremony. I still have vivid memories of standing in the boat that my grandfather built a long time ago, listening to the elders conversing about the ocean's appearance.

Since then, purchase of imported modern boats came to replace the more laborious choice of making traditional plank boats, whose numbers on the beaches declined. Motor boats are fast and convenient. During the flying fish season, you start the engine, turn the steering wheel, and very quickly you are at the fishing grounds, with capacity for a sizeable catch. Traditional plank boats require paddling to reach the fishing ground, which is much more effort. Moreover, the volume of catch is more limited. From an economic point of view, the traditional lashed-lug plank boat does not give much benefit or make much 'rational' sense.

And yet, there are some good reasons to embark on the long and complicated process of building a traditional Ta-u fishing boat. For one, you get to know your family's land in the mountain forest. Only then can you cut down the trees needed for the boat. Each plank needs to be carved out from specific parts of certain trees and carried down the mountain, a part of the process that makes you feel utterly exhausted. Then the planks and wooden pieces are assembled into a boat, and the boat is decorated with engraved totems. Each of the numerous steps in the process requires knowledge and skill, which one acquires along the way, as in an apprenticeship. Unengraved boats do not call for a special boat launch ceremony.

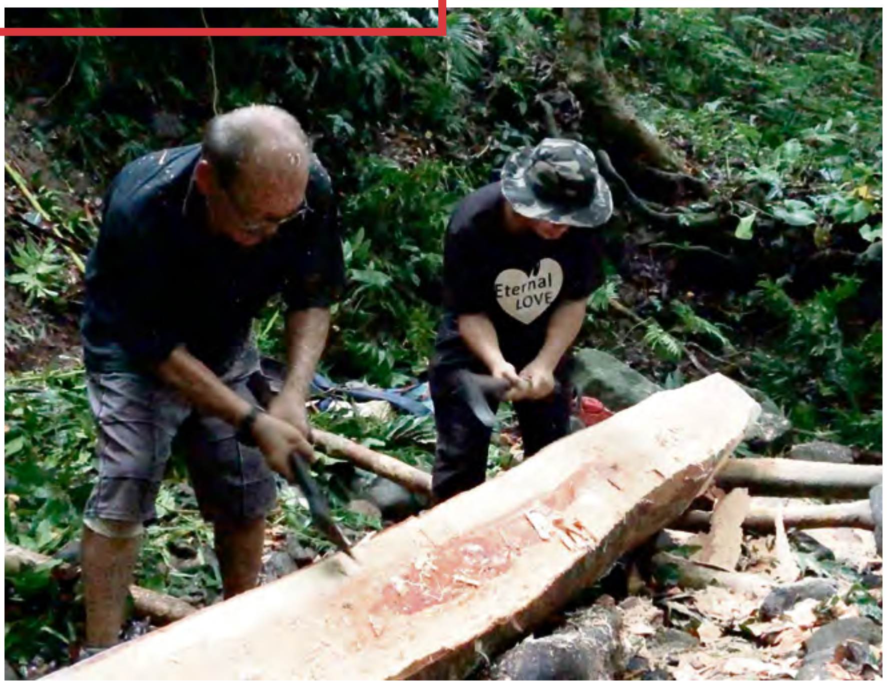


Fig. 1 (above): Carving out a plank. (Photo courtesy of Si Rapongang, 2020)

But if you engrave totems on your boat, you need to prepare for a large festive ceremony, including gifting plenty of taro and pork to family and friends.

This long and tedious project makes some Ta-u men hesitate. If you want to make a boat, you need an abundance of determination and endurance to complete it. But the entire process is inherently, deeply rewarding.

Nowadays, Indigenous people are more willing to invest time and money in tourism to make money. To raise a family, buy daily necessities, and pay for all kinds of expenses, you need money. The number of people willing to go up the mountain to chop down trees, carve out planks, and make a boat is getting smaller and smaller.

When I returned from Taiwan, where I worked and studied, to Pongso no Ta-u in 2016, my grandfather's and father's boats had become worn out. So when I participated in the Summoning of the Flying Fish ceremony, I joined a team of ten rowers in a large boat – *cinedkheran*, which is similar in design to the *tatala*, but much larger, for use farther out at sea – for the common ritual of the kin group. Before long, I began to wish for my own boat so that our family would have a place to gather on the *vanuwa* (beach).

When I talked with my parents, they told me that we needed to spend much time and effort to prepare for it. In 2019 I went into the mountains together with my father to search for suitable trees for the various planks, and in 2020 we started to chop down trees and carve out planks for the boat. Most of the wooden boards were carried down the hill on my shoulders and the shoulders of my father and another friend. It was very heavy and exhausting, but down we went!

Once we carried a wooden plank down the mountain, we would continue to carve it out. After we finished roughly 80 percent, careful not to carve away too much, we went back up the mountain to chop and carve another plank. A tatala requires 15 boards and a number of other wooden parts. After assembling the boat, we brought it home to engrave, which entails preparing for a boat launch ritual. My father would surely give blessings to me and the boat, for this was my first boat. It was my father who introduced me to the forest on the mountain and helped me build the boat. This was the mission my grandfather had entrusted to my father, a mission he had hereby completed.

Thirty years ago, this patch of ocean was filled with plank boats catching flying fish. Sadly, we are now only a few who fish from plank boats. But I rejoice in the happiness this brings! I want to keep going until I cannot push the boat anymore.

Si Rapongan lives in Imourud. He currently serves as Yami representative in the Council of Indigenous Peoples. At age 12, he left his island to study in Taiwan. At age 26, while working at the Taiwan Indigenous Library and Information Center in Taipei, he came to realise the depth of his cultural heritage. Several years later, he returned to his home island to immerse himself in Ta-u knowledge and practice. In 2020, he built a two-man boat together with his father. Email: klin19867597@gmail.com

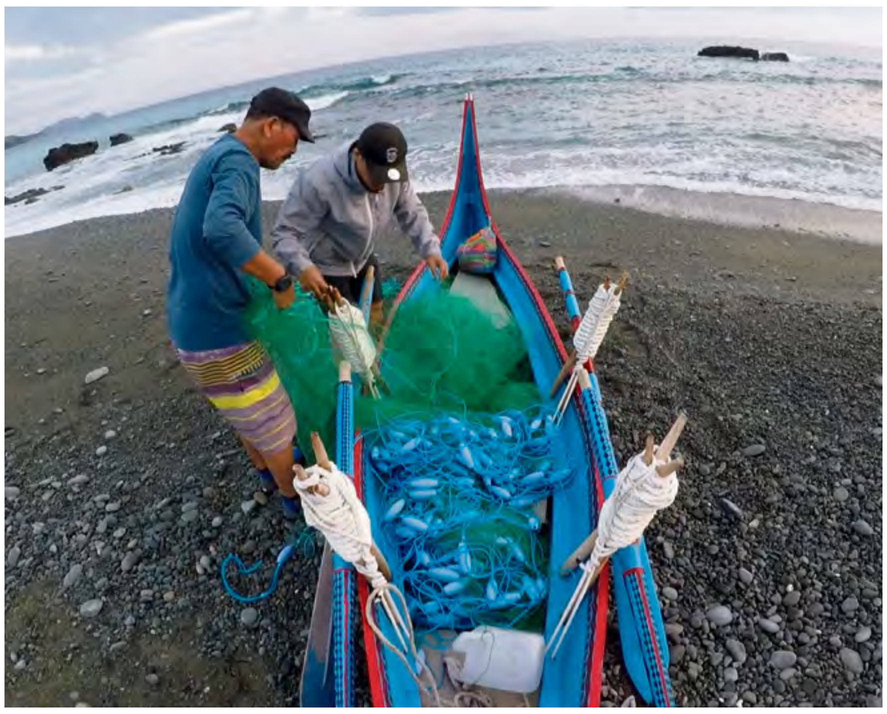


Fig. 2 (above): Preparing to go out fishing. (Photo courtesy of Si Rapongan, 2021)

Matarek So Vahey – New Family

Sinan Yongala

Traditional Ta-u society is patrilocal and egalitarian. Men and women have a strict division of labour: women's place is the land, the taro fields, and men's place is the ocean. This changes as money, capitalism, and tourism infiltrate the everyday life of Ta-u families. Caring for fields and plants is strenuous and fills much of a Ta-u woman's day. So does juggling the two identities of being Ta-u and Taiwanese, manifested in two names.

In traditional Ta-u social concepts, the family is the most important social unit. When a new family is formed, the woman joins her husband's family and they establish a new home – *matarek so vahey*. Couples have a close relationship and, within a clear division of labor, are supportive of each other. In daily life and in ceremonial rituals Ta-u culture emphasizes a sense of oneness between husband and wife.

Seven years ago, I interviewed my mother while filming a documentary about the making of a *matarek so vahey*. She told me: "After a man and a woman formally become husband and wife, they begin to organize a family by finding land to cultivate and plant crops. After planting sweet potato, they plant yams, and after planting yams, they plant taro. According to traditional Ta-u custom, they form a *matarek so vahey*, a new family, a new home. Men learn to build boats and go fishing, while women practice taro planting and learn the traditional art of weaving."

It is commonly said of the gender division of labor between Ta-u men and women that the sea is the field of men, while the field is the sea of women. In reality it is not entirely that simple. Women do not touch boats during flying fish season, but during the rest of the year they may approach the boats of the family in connection with activities at the beach. Likewise, while women are responsible for planting, harvesting, and maintaining the fields, men are often included in other sorts of field-related work, such as clearing new fields and building irrigation ditches and channels.

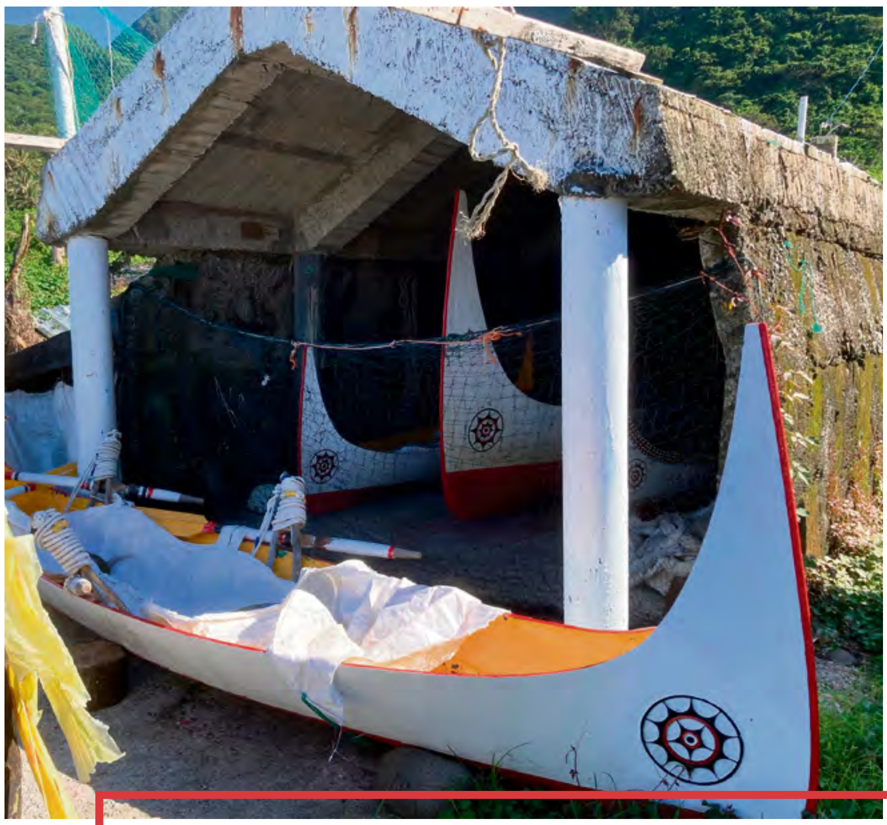
Women are not allowed to attend funerals or approach burial grounds, which are often in rugged terrain with cliffs and dense vegetation. Such taboos are not established through any decision, but rather reflect a set of life attitudes – and perhaps risk management, as, for instance, when women stay away from the ocean and cliffs – passed down through the generations in deep cultural layers.

While establishing our family, my husband and I made serious efforts to live as Ta-u, to learn and practice Ta-u culture. My mother said, "Now that you have established a family, you can't ask your mother and father to bring you taro every time there is a traditional celebration. Don't you have hands and feet?" This made a deep impression on me. I realized that this is a crucial matter. I am no longer a little girl. I have a family, a husband, and two children. Animated by my mother's words, my husband and I picked up hoes, cameras, and tripods, and we went to the mountains to cultivate the land and document the process.

Cultivation is a long and arduous process. In order to turn natural land into a taro field, we first cleared away all the vegetation with our bare hands, mounded up the soil, and drew in water from the mountain to irrigate the field. As an inexperienced couple, it took two months until the first taro seedling was planted.

Our work caring for the taro had only just begun. We had to regularly inspect the fields, weed, and check the water level. One year later, the taro that we had worked so hard to cultivate was eaten up by wild boar. Not a single root was left for us. But we did not give up on growing taro. We remained hopeful to eat the fruits of our hard work during the next flying fish season.

Although I have worked very hard to document and preserve the island's living culture and to remember the traditional wisdom of Ta-u women, it is clear that in



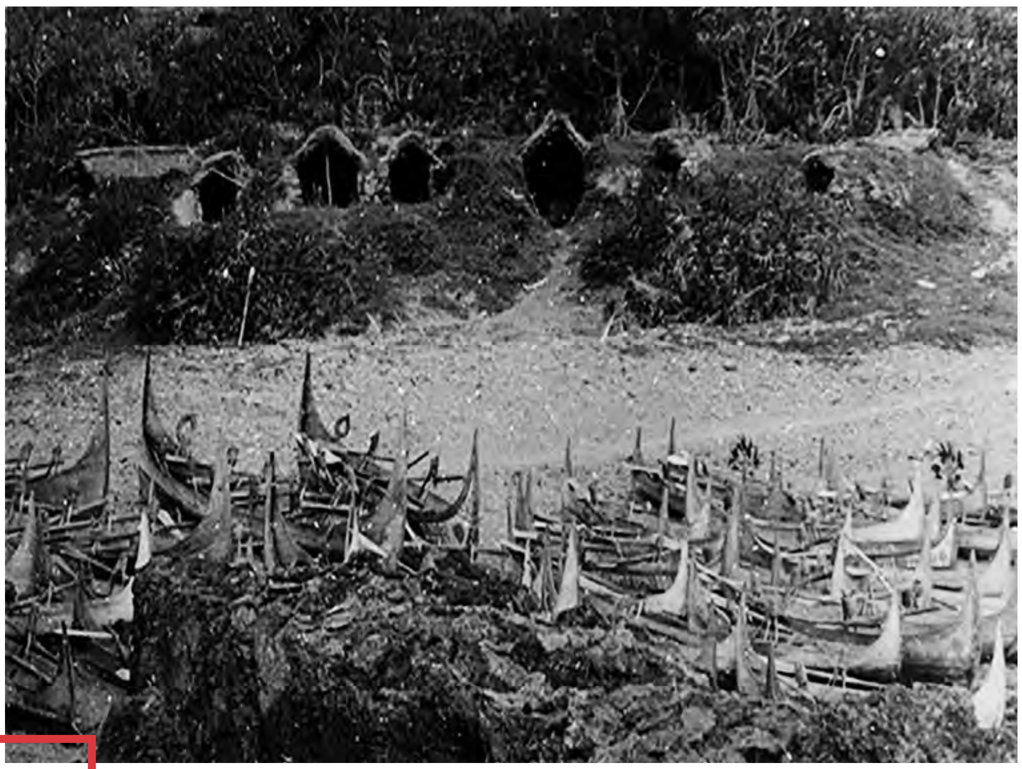


Fig. 1 (left): Kamalig boathouse. (Photo by Annika Pissin, 2023)

Fig. 2 (right): Kamalig boathouses, Academia Sinica archives. (Photo by Ping-Hsiung LIU, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sininca in Taipei, 1962)

Kamalig – Boathouse

Syamen Womzas

The Yami people on Pongso no Ta-u are the only maritime ethnic group among the 16 officially recognised Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan. The Yami use local materials to make plank boats to fish for migratory fish that visit the island regularly, and for subtidal fish that inhabit the coral reefs along the coast. The rich marine resources have enabled the Yami to be self-sufficient on the island and to develop a unique marine culture.

In the daily life of the Yami tribe, the beach in front of the settlement is not only the usual place for children to play, but also the place where the village holds the Flying Fish Ceremony. It is also the home of the beautiful plank boats. Most of the Yami families on Pongso no Ta-u have built boathouses to shelter their boats, both big and small.

The boathouse is the coastal home of the plank boat. When flying fish season starts, the Yami push the ornate boats from the boathouses to the beach. Here they play a central role in the various festivals held during the flying fish season, and they are used for catching flying fish at both daytime and nighttime. During the flying fish season, the boathouse is a place where the fishing group congregates, and the members of the fishing group warm themselves with a fire in the boathouse, waiting for the opportunity to row out and catch flying fish.

In late autumn and early winter, when the northeastern monsoon winds begin to pound the island and conditions are not favorable for the plank boats to operate at sea, it is time for the boats to be placed in the boathouses. There are two types of boathouses: one is shared by fishing groups and is used to store large boats, while the other belongs to an individual household and is used to store the smaller one-, two-, or three-person boats *(tatala).*

The main practical purpose of building a boathouse is to extend the life of the boat, which represents a major repository of practical and symbolic value. A properly stored plank boat can be used for more than ten years. If left out in the weather, the sun, winds, and rains reduce the life of the boat to three to five years. Therefore, almost all who build a boat also build a boathouse to shelter the boat.

The forests of Pongso no Ta-u are limited, so if you care for your boat and extend its lifespan, you can save trees needed to build your next boat. By cutting down fewer trees, there remain more trees for future generations. In Yami culture you do not ask, "How can we use our environment sustainably?" These concepts are already embedded in the actual practices of daily life and do not need to be deliberately designed or purposively programmed.

Syamen Womzas lives in Yayo. At age 15, he left to study at Taitung Normal College. He returned at age 20 to serve as a teacher and principal of a school on Lanyu. He is dedicated to developing Yami Indigenous education. He is currently Yami representative in the Indigenous People Transitional Justice Commission under the R.O.C. Presidential Office. He advocates the rights and interests of the Yami, especially the removal of nuclear waste from Pongso no Ta-u, practicing social justice, and leaving a clean and beautiful island to future generations. Email: syamen.womzas@gmail.com

Boat and Boathouse Vocabulary

Boat house: *kamalig*

Types of boats
- Small boat: tatala
- One person boat: pikatangyan
- Two person boat: pikavangan
- Three person boat: pinonongnongan
- Eight person boat: apat so avat
- Ten person boat: cinedkheran

Places to build a houseboat:
kamamaligan (above the highest tides)

Structural parts of a boathouse
- Foundation: sako no kamalig
- Stone wall: atoy no kamalig
- Longitudinal beams: sapawan
- Horizontal beam: pakaow
- Roof: atep no kamalig
- Pillar: ai na
- Y-shaped bracket: pakow
- Joints between beams and columns: panyakedan

Boathouse materials, trees and plants
- Philippine fire tree: aninibzawen ('hard as iron'); or stinky lady: aryoh (for Y-shaped brackets)
- Tarzan bamboo: kawalan (for beams)
- Red-leafed rattan: ozis; Indian whip rattan: wakey; or Orchid rattan: vazit (for fixing beams to supports)
- White fescue: vocid (for roofing)

Boathouse materials, stone
- Andesite: *veysen*
- Coral reef rock: *haan*

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the face of the rapid changes of the times, our traditions are no longer all there is to life. The people of Pongso no Ta-u can no longer afford to ignore the value of money. In order to support their families, younger generations are caught between traditional culture and the 'realities' of life, with money consistently in conflict with traditional Ta-u life, especially the traditional rituals of the Ta-u seasonal calendar. During the long flying fish season each year (February to September), ever fewer young people return from the Big Island (Taiwan) to participate in traditional ceremonies.

With capitalism comes tourism, and our young people now prefer to engage in the tourism business. The younger generations have lost much of the knowledge underlying the rituals, and many of the rituals have become simplified as they approach the brink of extinction. This breach in cultural continuity deeply concerns me.

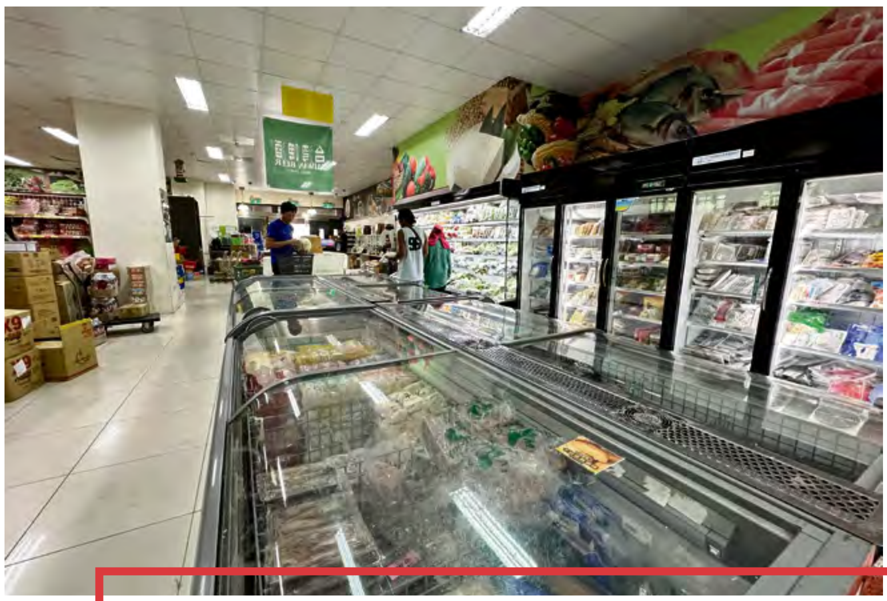
Fig. 3 (right): Sinan Yongala and her mother at work in the field. (Photo by Si Panadan, 2017)

How well do I know my home? My culture? I have been pondering these questions over and over since I was a young girl, and my ponderings have only intensified with bearing and rearing children. With the growing impacts of Taiwanese culture on island life and the cycle of traditional Ta-u rituals, I believe that without our cultural roots as source of nourishment, as bedrock foundation, we face immense challenges.

In order to not become an outsider in my native place, I struggle with my two identities as Xie Fumei and Sinan Yongala. Xie Fumei is my official name, forced on me by the Taiwanese government, for use in formal documents and Taiwanese contexts. It has no other connection or meaning to my life. Sinan Yongala, on the other hand, means mother of Yongala, which means 'blessing' and is the name of my eldest child. His name is Si Yongala, like my name was Si Namot – namot means diligent – until I became a mother. When Si Yongala someday becomes a father, his name will change to Syaman Name-of-child, and my name again changes, this time to Syapen Name-of-grandchild, and I will share that name with my husband. Such a beautiful naming culture!

With my two identities and two names, I balance on the edge between two societies, two cultures, two lives: Ta-u traditional life and Taiwanese-influenced modern life. As a mother, householder, and writer, I continuously struggle to affirm and nurture my Indigenous culture, while coping with contemporary conditions of life on our island.

Sinan Yongala is a resident of Iranmeylek and has been a passionate writer and photographer since attending Lanyu Junior High School. After higher education in Taiwan from age 15, she returned in her 20s when the Lan-An Cultural and Educational Foundation offered her a position to develop her interests. For over two decades, she served as a dedicated journalist for the *Lanyu Bi-Weekly Journal.* Through her eloquent reporting and captivating documentary films, she meticulously documented the significant transformations unfolding on Orchid Island. Email: sinamot@gmail.com



Planting Hope and Planting Love

Syamen Womzas

The Taiwanese inherited Japanese colonial schools on Pongso no Ta-u, expanded them, and made them effective instruments for the assimilation of the Yami into Taiwanese culture and society. The school system largely ignored Yami food culture. In both curriculum and in practice, schooling generated radical change in the food habits of the Yami. By that same power, schools can be crucial places for re-awakening food memory, which lies at the heart of learning to be Yami.

Plant Hope, Plant Love
The first day of school,
a day connecting children
and earth.
We use our hands together,
in our soil,
to plant seeds of hope.
Let the soil brim with hope.
Hope, rooted in the soil,
needs the care of love.
In this way, the hope of children
may be realised.

I wrote this poem after leading the teachers and students of Lanyu Elementary School to plant sweet potatoes on the first day of school in August 2019. Why should we lead teachers and students to plant sweet potatoes? The original idea was to give an orientation for teachers and students about sweet potatoes and taro, the traditional staple foods of the Yami. The reason I chose to plant only sweet potatoes in the school garden is that the soil is suitable for sweet potatoes, but not for taro. In addition, sweet potatoes need a mere four months to grow and can be harvested just after the school term ends, whereas taro roots need at least ten months or a year to grow before they can be harvested.

Four months later, teachers and students could harvest sweet potatoes together at the end of the semester, so the students could take them home to eat with their families. I harbour a great hope that, through education, the Yami people may regain the food autonomy they lost in recent decades. How did the Yami lose their food autonomy? The schooling system of the Republic of China (Taiwan) has played a crucial role in this.

After World War II, when the Republic of China took over Taiwan, it continued the education system initiated during the Japanese occupation. In order to promote standardised national education to the general public, it carried out an assimilation policy and established public elementary schools in Indigenous villages across Taiwan, including four schools on Orchid Island. My parents attended public schools on Orchid Island during the 1950s. School lunches were often sweet potato and taro brought from home by the students. Occasionally, the school kitchen served steamed buns made of imported wheat flour. But at that time, the staple food of Yami families was still taro and sweet potatoes.

The government set up a police headquarters and jail on Orchid Island in 1952 to detain Taiwanese prisoners (discontinued in 1979), and in 1958 the Veterans Affairs Council established farms (discontinued in 1991). These two institutions occupied much of the Yami land. As a result, the islanders were unable to grow enough staple food to support their families and came to rely on charity food from churches – wheat, flour, and a little rice – to supplement the lack of taro and sweet potato.

When I entered first grade in public elementary school in 1975, school lunches were regularly provided. School lunches were mainly steamed buns, with ferns gathered by the students themselves. The staple food of the Yami people's homes was still taro and sweet potatoes. Rice was the “snack” at home. Only when my father went to work in Taiwan could he buy a bag of rice and carry it home. After sharing with relatives and friends, only half a bag was left to eat at home. With many family members, the rice was usually eaten up within a few days.

I started junior high school in 1981. Back then, the school provided accommodation and three meals a day. There was only one junior high school on the island, and students came from all six villages. Due to inconvenient transportation, most students had to stay overnight at school during the weekdays. Rice and steamed buns were provided for all three meals. Taro and sweet potatoes were only eaten when I went home on weekends or holidays. My eating habits changed radically, from primarily traditional Yami food to primarily Han/Taiwanese food.

Until 1989, when I started teaching in the public elementary school system, school lunches consisted mostly of rice, plus one dish of vegetable or meat and a cup of soup. My parents and brothers had some income at that time, so they could buy bags of rice from Taiwan. Rice gradually became the staple food for all three daily meals at home, as it did for other families on the island. The traditional staple foods of the Yami people, taro and sweet potato, had become a minor part of our daily diet. Today, taro and sweet potato only appear on the dining table during more important festivals, such as the Flying Fish Festival, the Beautiful Month Festival,[1] other spiritual rituals, and various inauguration ceremonies.

The key driving force behind such a major shift in eating habits is public schools: not only the meals, but also the education. For over 75 years, teaching was held in Mandarin Chinese, and the books and curriculum were the same as in Taiwan. Over time, this caused assimilation into Taiwanese culture and sowed seeds of alienation from the Indigenous Yami culture. For me, teaching local knowledge is important to counter assimilation and strengthen Yami culture. There is a lack of schoolbooks with Yami perspectives and knowledge. With this in mind, my mission is to create schoolbooks that include Yami cultural elements and knowledge in each and every subject. These will complement the main textbooks. Our children grow up in two worlds: Taiwanese and Yami. As a teacher, I seek to instill in the pupils the roots of Yami culture: self-confidence, respect, gratitude, and sharing. I also seek to educate the children about the importance of food.

It is a shame that the traditional staple foods of taro and sweet potato, which are local, seasonal, and have the shortest food mileage and carbon footprint, have not been prioritised in the school system. Therefore, I want to awaken food memories of the Yami people through various activities in the school, so that the Yami can become at least partially self-sufficient in their food provisioning and eating habits, instead of being entirely dependent on imported food.

When the food memory of the Yami returns, the abandoned land on Pongso no Ta-u can find vitality and life again, and this is what I desire and wish for in my heart.

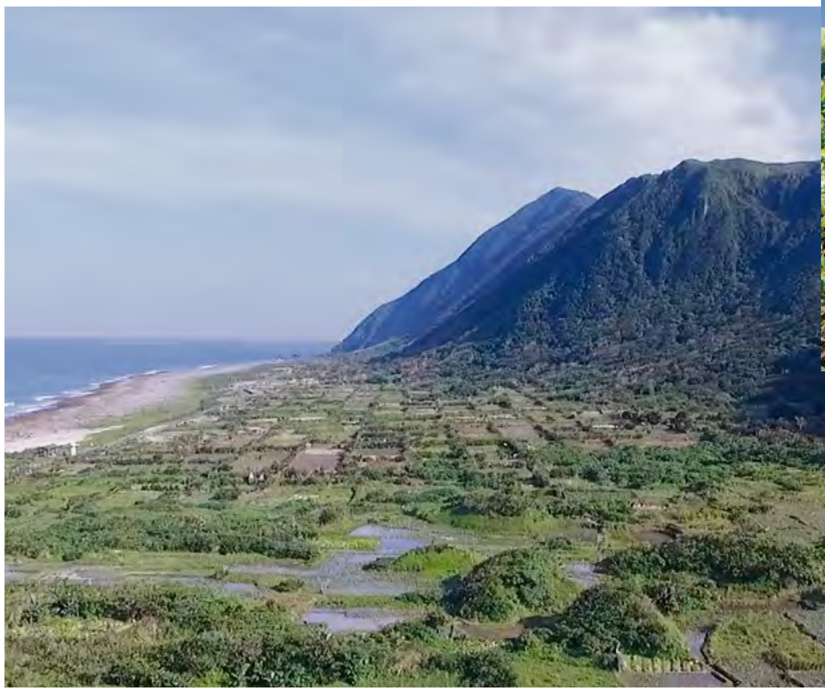


Fig. 1 (above left): Imported foods at the modern grocery store on Lanyu. (Photo by Syaman Lamuran, 2024)

Fig. 2 (above right): The school garden with recently planted sweet potatoes. (Photo by Annika Pissin, 2023)

Fig. 3 (right): The farmland of Ivarino (occupied by veteran farms, 1958-1991). (Photo by Si Rapongan, 2016)

Fig. 4 (right inset): Syamen Womzas in his potato field in Imourud. (Photo by Huei-Min Tsai, 2023)

Syamen Womzas lives in Yayo. At age 15, he left to study at Taitung Normal College. He returned at age 20 to serve as a teacher and principal of a school on Lanyu. He is dedicated to developing Yami Indigenous education. He is currently Yami representative in the Indigenous People Transitional Justice Commission under the R.O.C. Presidential Office. He advocates the rights and interests of the Yami, especially the removal of nuclear waste from Pongso no Ta-u, practicing social justice, and leaving a clean and beautiful island to future generations.
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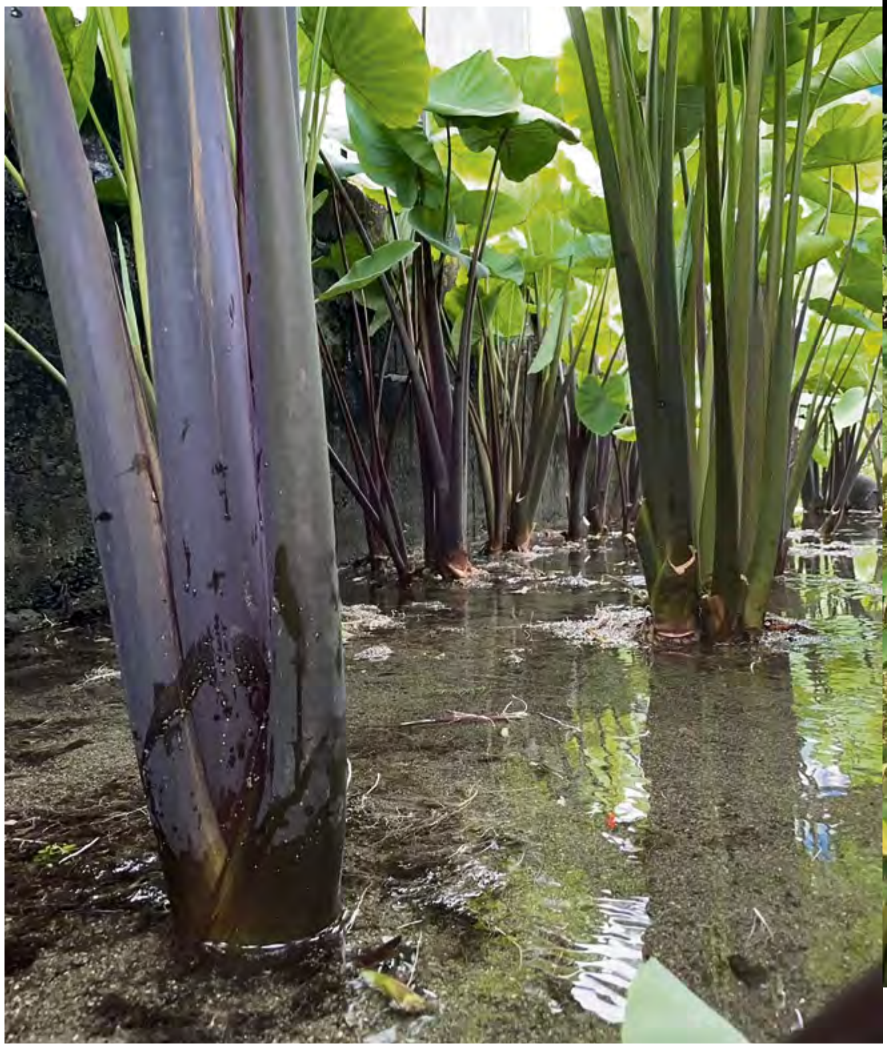
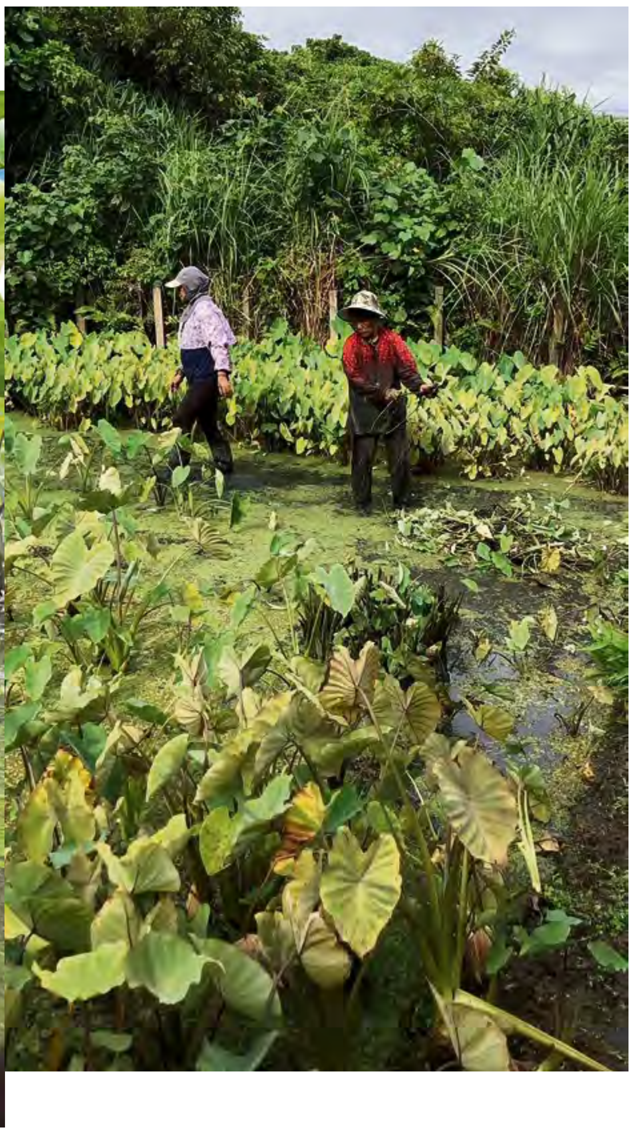
Notes

[1] Known as *piya vehan*, this festival celebrates the end of flying fish season, which we observe by clapping hands and singing to acknowledge the prosperity that flying fish brought to us.





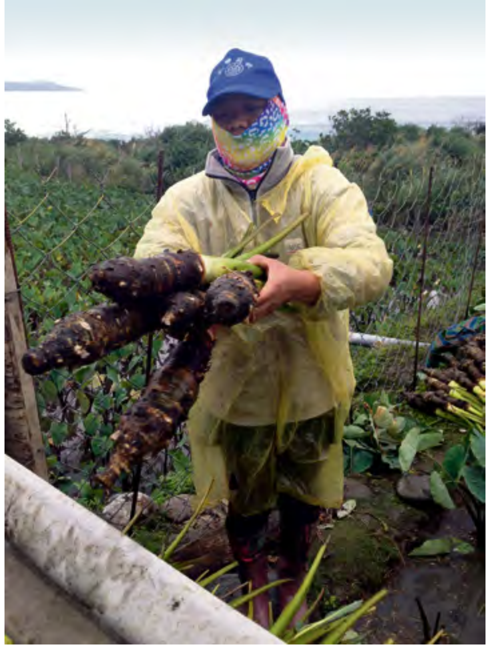


Fig. 1 (top left): Taro growing in the water. (Photo by Sinan Lamuran, 2023)

Fig. 2 (top centre): Tending a taro field. (Photo by Sinan Lamuran, 2022)

Fig. 3 (top right): Harvesting taro. (Photo by Syaman Lamuran, 2015)

Fig. 4 (bottom left): Taros and the new boat. (Photo by Syaman Lamuran, 2003)

Fig. 5 (bottom right): Sinan Lamuran takes care of her taro field. (Photo by Huei-Min Tsai, 2023)

Taro

Sinan Lamuran

The importance of taro for the Ta-u cannot be overstated. This goes for everyday life as much as for the peaks of ceremonial life. Women put a great deal of work into tending the fields, and into each and every plant. Generations and kin bond in the taro field, in the taro meal, and in the ceremonial sharing of taro. Discontinuing taro cultivation and abandoning fields leads to a loss in Ta-u language and culture. Reclaiming taro cultivation edifies and secures Ta-u language and culture for coming generations.

Taro is an important part of my life. I plant taro, care for taro plants, and tend taro fields. There are many kinds of taro. I keep six kinds of taro in my taro field. These vary. Some can be harvested after nine months, whereas others can be harvested only after two or three years.

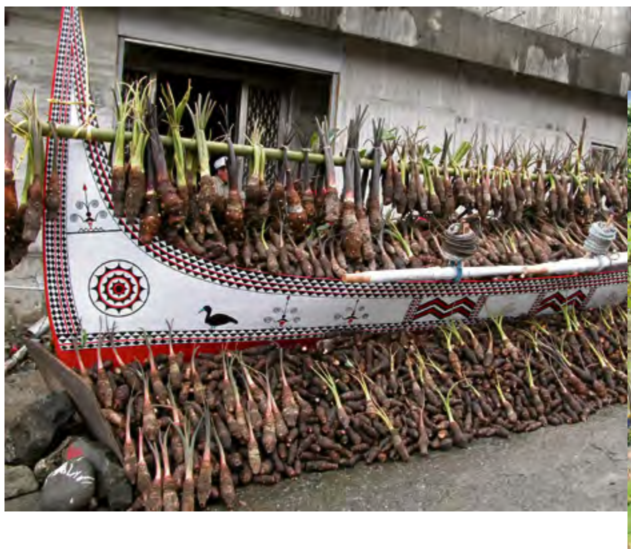
My mother took care of the taro field right up until five days before she died. After that, my sister and I took over her fields. Women do most of the work tending taro fields. But men help to clear and make taro fields, to maintain water flows into the fields, and to carry the taro when many roots are harvested for ceremonies and festivities.

Launching a new boat requires massive volumes of taro, which means two to three years of preparation to grow many taro plants, as well as several work days to harvest. Harvesting for festivities includes ceremonial wearing of traditional Ta-u clothes and singing about the taro. The new boat is then filled with taro, and large piles of taro are presented to guests as gifts to celebrate the new boat. Guests, in turn, pay their respect to both the new boat and the quality of the taro gifts, singing praises and giving thanks for the hard work of growing the taro.

Nowadays, some Ta-u use chemical herbicides and pesticides to make taro cultivation less labour-intensive. The invasive ‘apple snail’ [*Pomacea canaliculata*] has reached Pongso no Ta-u, causing us to make the difficult choice between use of pesticides or additional manual work to minimise their damage. I do not use chemicals. These pollute the soil, water, and taro roots. When others use chemicals, we talk with them and ask them to discontinue use for the benefit of our common environment.

Food imports of rice, bread, and noodles have largely displaced taro and yams. These new staples do not only provision the large influx of tourists, but are also used for school meals and, increasingly, in Ta-u households. Taro fields are abandoned as food is purchased from grocery stores and as young Ta-u women move to Taiwan. Forests take over the areas of abandoned fields.

Taro and yams are not attractive for many young people, who have become used to other foods. Some tourists seeking a genuine experience of the island wish to buy taro and dried flying fish. During tourist season, some families sell these to the grocery stores, or from stands adjacent to the grocery stores, the harbour, and the airport. However, most taro is not for sale on markets but is rather reserved for one’s own family meals, for ceremonial festivities, and to share with neighbours.



When young mothers do not plant taro, their daughters will not plant, and knowledge about the plant gets lost. Because so little taro is grown, it sometimes has to be imported for a big festival. The guests of the festival are not able to sing their blessings of the taro, as they do not know who planted and cared for it, nor where it grew. In this way, abandoning taro fields leads to loss of culture. Gradually, taro cultivation is becoming as threatened as our language, our boats, and other aspects of our heritage. Nonetheless, taro continues to be important for the Ta-u.

When I was in my 30s, I had a great sense of achievement from planting taro. I was very happy to see my wet-field taro grow beautifully and robustly. Every time I came back from the taro fields in the evening, I would first go to my mother’s house in Imourud (Red Head Village) and tell her what I did for the day. My mother listened to me happily as she brought out a cooked dinner for me to eat and told me how her mother had surrounded herself with the same crops. So, when I harvested the taro and saw the happy expression on my mother’s face when I gave it to her, the fatigue of the day completely disappeared without a trace. Words cannot describe my mother’s appearance, but it gave me a great sense of accomplishment.

Our mother conveyed her happiness to all of her children. Consequently, we diligently planted taro and sweet potatoes, and in the autumn we planted vegetables. The vegetables my mother planted were so beautiful! She had no formal education, but she learned from nature and did very well with the crops on her land. I really felt happy to be a farmer. In the dry fields, in addition to sweet potatoes and taros, I also planted papayas, bananas, pumpkins, pineapples, and other kinds of food plants.

After my mother passed away, my mood was affected and I seldom went to the field to work. Before, I was very happy with the harvest of whatever I planted, but after my mother left, I only planted but did not harvest. Without having someone to harvest *for*, I felt empty, but I keep farming and do not give up.

Planting and tending taro makes me happy. This keeps me in touch with my mother’s spirit. I take care of taro, as it is central to our culture and way of life. This is why I will continue to plant and care for taro.

Sinan Lamuran lives in Iratay. At age 15, she left home for an education on Taiwan. After high school, she attended a seminary in Hualien, returning to Orchid Island after graduation. She worked for the international charity World Vision, aiding Ta-u communities. As a broadcaster for Orchid Island Radio Station, she promoted the linguistic heritage of her people. She now operates a B&B and takes care of her taro fields. Her passion for traditional farming stays strong alongside her community dedication.
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Tourism on Orchid Island

Syaman Lamuran (Tung En-Tze)

Ori o ikapia
no maka-ahas-en
a kanakan ya,
ta aro o kane-kanen
do takey a panila an
no kanakan am.

For a child who likes
to go up into the mountains,
there are many things
to gather and eat.

The lifting of legislative barriers in 1966 opened Orchid Island to flows of capital and civilian travel, and Taiwanese rapidly invested in tourism infrastructure. The new tourism insulted the Ta-u people, caused considerable environmental damage, and did not benefit the Ta-u local economies. Instead, most profits went to Taiwan. Slowly, Ta-u people have replaced this vulture tourism with small-scale B&Bs, shops, cafés, and restaurants that are locally owned and operated. This Indigenous-led tourism constitutes a paradigm shift in the island economy and attracts Ta-u people living in Taiwan to move back to the island. Nonetheless, environmental challenges persist.

For Ta-u people born on Pongso no Ta-u before the 1980s, the *tokon* (mountain) behind the village and the *wawa* (sea) in front compose the dominant setting where everyday life plays out. The mountains, village with surrounding taro fields and gardens, beach, intertidal zones, and nearshore underwater spear hunting areas display a fascinating and imaginative landscape. In addition to endowing a bounty of foods and useful materials, the natural environment of the island moves people to quiet themselves, to establish relationships with the fields they have cleared, and to become familiar with the places of gathering marine life in the intertidal zone and the sea. It is the provider of seclusion, skills, and satisfaction, of harvests and healing. The peaceful landscape reflects the long history of interactions between the Ta-u and the natural environment.

Prior to the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945), Orchid Island had very little interaction with other places, and ecological balance was deeply ingrained in Ta-u culture. The Japanese government designated Orchid Island a protected ethnological research site, limiting access to scientists for research purposes. Consequently, when the nationalist government of the Republic of China took over the island after World War II, the natural environment was relatively pristine and the Ta-u people had maintained a unique lifestyle of traditional culture. Under Taiwanese rule, however, both the environment and the culture of Orchid Island were rapidly exposed to powerful forces of change, not least of which was the tourism industry.

In contrast to the predominant attitude of many tourists, when Ta-u people leave their homes they commonly harbour a humble and respectful heart towards the surrounding natural environment. They avoid causing environmental damage. Nevertheless, due to the strong influence of invasive cultures and the infiltration of capitalist social relations, traditional Indigenous concepts, knowledge of nature, and associated communal beliefs have gradually declined. Under pressure from ‘development’ and tourism business, Ta-u people have begun to make a living by operating B&Bs, restaurants, diving shops, and tour guide services. This modern business lifestyle has changed, even displaced, the traditional culture of sharing and has weakened interpersonal connections.

The number of Ta-u people engaged in tourism has steadily increased, but their incomes remain relatively meager. Meanwhile, the social, cultural, and environmental impacts of tourism pose considerable threats and challenges. As tourism continues to surge, can the island's traditional knowledge and Ta-u culture continue to be recognised and passed on? Can locally owned and managed tourism contribute to the local economy while integrating with Ta-u culture? How can Orchid Island's natural environment be protected from the impacts of tourism? These are urgent issues facing the people of Orchid Island.

Fig. 1 (above): Tourists arriving at the harbour in October 2018. (Photo by Eric Clark, 2018)

Fig. 2 (right): Syaman Lamuran showing the making of a 20-person boat that will be rowed to the Batanes this autumn. (Photo by Annika Pissin, 2023)

Island tourism in 1980s

In 1966, the “Mountain Indigenous Reserve Management Policy” was revised, lifting the protective regulations and allowing for free movement of capital. This marked the beginning of the island's opening up to the outside world for tourism. After the construction of Kaiyuan Port in 1969 (for fishing boats, cargo, and passenger boats), the volumes of cement construction and heavy machinery on the island multiplied. Capitalist ‘investors’ from Taiwan commenced construction of hotels on the island in a campaign to develop tourism. Lanyu Hotel was built in 1970 and Yayo Inn in 1972. The construction of the round-the-island road during the 1970s transformed the natural coastal line into a highly uncoordinated visual landscape. Various products “Made in Taiwan” entered every corner of every village on the island. Self-sufficient ways of life were transformed as the Ta-u people became vulnerably dependent on Taiwanese imports.

In the 1980s, port and airport expansions were completed, and mass tourists from Taiwan poured into Orchid Island to experience so-called “alien culture” tours. Medium-sized buses filled with Taiwanese tourists drove around the island, stopping at every village. This peaked in 1987, when nearly 260,000 tourists visited the island, which at the time had a population of roughly 3000. Due to the package holiday operations – “one coordinated process” including transportation, accommodation, and meals – of the Taiwanese travel agencies, all the profits flowed directly to Taiwanese investors. When tourists entered the villages, they often used disrespectful words to judge the daily life of the Ta-u people. They criticized our people's appearance, clothing, and food and often voiced derogatory remarks on the island's culture (e.g., “uncivilised”). The tourists even entered people's homes without permission. These kinds of encounters gave the Ta-u unfavourable impressions of Taiwanese tourists and an aversion to tourism in general.

Participating in the tourism industry in the 2000s

Following the tourism bubble in the 1980s, not so many tourists visited Orchid Island during the 1990s and 2000s, due largely to inconvenient transportation and relatively high costs of travel. In recent years, however, partly stimulated by extensive media reports, Taiwanese and foreign backpackers have increasingly visited Orchid Island to experience the Ta-u culture. Most of these tourists come to Orchid Island as individual travelers, rather than the groups on the package trips of 1980s charter tourism. They do their ‘homework’ on the Internet before coming to the island. Compared with the tourists in the 1980s, who typically arrived with an unfriendly “hunting for strange customs” superiority, the attitudes of recent tourists concerning cultural respect have improved.

The Ta-u people have engaged directly in the operation and management of tourism business for less than 20 years. In the early days, only a handful of people worked in tourism as cleaners and other low-wage workers at the large Taiwanese hotels. In recent years, many Ta-u people on the island have opened their own businesses. Guesthouses, B&Bs, and Homestays have become the preference of visitors, and such accomodations now dominate tourism on the island. The Ta-u interact directly with tourists and manage the business themselves. Tourist revenues increasingly stay within the local economy. This way of earning income attracts many Ta-u people. They no longer need to leave their home island to find a job in the cities in Taiwan, and they can take care of their parents and elderly relatives nearby. During the off-season, some even go abroad and become tourists themselves.

The number of Ta-u People involved in tourism-related industries has steadily increased since the 2000s. Many people who worked for a long time in Taiwan returned to Orchid Island. There was considerable return migration that lasted for more than a decade. Initially, people who returned home to island life often felt suspicious eyes and were met with questions from neighbours about their reasons for coming back. Were they perhaps faced with unemployment in Taiwan? Were they escaping the burdens of stress in the big cities? Many struggled with being torn between family affections and livelihood, caught in a dilemma between "tribal relations" and "urban opportunities."

Iratay

The village where I live, Iratay, is situated in an excellent geographical location on the southwest coast. Not far to the left (facing the ocean) is the village of Imourud, the administrative center on the island, including the township office, primary health care, and post office. It is also a hub where tourists gather. Many tourism businesses, such as Wenwen Handicraft Shop, Lanyu Hotel, and grocery shops, are also located here. To the right of Iratay lies the Taipower Power Plant, the Lan-An Cultural and Educational Foundation, and the Orchid Island Airport. About a ten-minute drive farther to the northwest is the village of Yayo, where tourists mainly arrive at and depart from the Kaiyuan Port. Due to their convenient locations near the main harbour and the airport, Yayo and Iratay rank first and second among villages in terms of numbers of B&B operations – with 35 and 30 such businesses, respectively.

Based on my experience of running a B&B at my home for the past ten years, tourist evaluations of B&Bs mainly depend on whether the host treats their guests with "heart" and whether the accommodation is clean and tidy. Generally, guests who have experienced generous hospitality will enthusiastically recommend a B&B to relatives or friends back in Taiwan. Thanks to many publications by Ta-u writers and enhanced information on the Internet, the Taiwanese public has improved their understanding of and respect for Ta-u culture and the environment of Orchid Island. This is clearly reflected in tourist literacy, norms, attitudes, and behaviours: "respect local culture," "behave like a polite guest," etc.

The rise of island B&Bs

The tourist season in Orchid Island is from April to mid-October. From 2000 to the outbreak of COVID-19, many Ta-u people moved back to their home from Taiwan. They returned to their villages with a little money and slowly invested in building up B&Bs, snorkelling and diving shops, and resTaurants. Lan-An Cultural and Educational Foundation (Lan-An), a local NGO, has played a crucial role in helping the Ta-u people participate in tourism management. Members of Lan-An – mostly Ta-u return migrants from Taiwan and Ta-u teachers in local schools – applied for grants for 'Integrated Community Capacity-Building' projects funded by government agencies (primarily the Council of Indigenous Affairs and the Council of Cultural Affairs). Lan-An provided courses for Ta-u people interested in B&B management or tourism-related businesses. After the courses, the foundation provided guidelines for participants willing to operate B&Bs or family inns, or to serve as ecological tour guides or nature interpreters.

Since the 2000s, many who participated in the Lan-An training activities have begun to use the spare rooms in their homes to receive tourists for overnight accommodation and charge basic room fees. In addition to those initially trained at Lan-An, their relatives and neighbours have often joined the home business of operating B&Bs and various tours and activities. They may take their guests to the intertidal zone to experience catching crabs or into the forest at night to learn about the forest ecosystems. The owners of B&Bs, family inns, and tour businesses have over time gained considerable experience. Through word-of-mouth they have established a positive reputation and become popular among tourists.

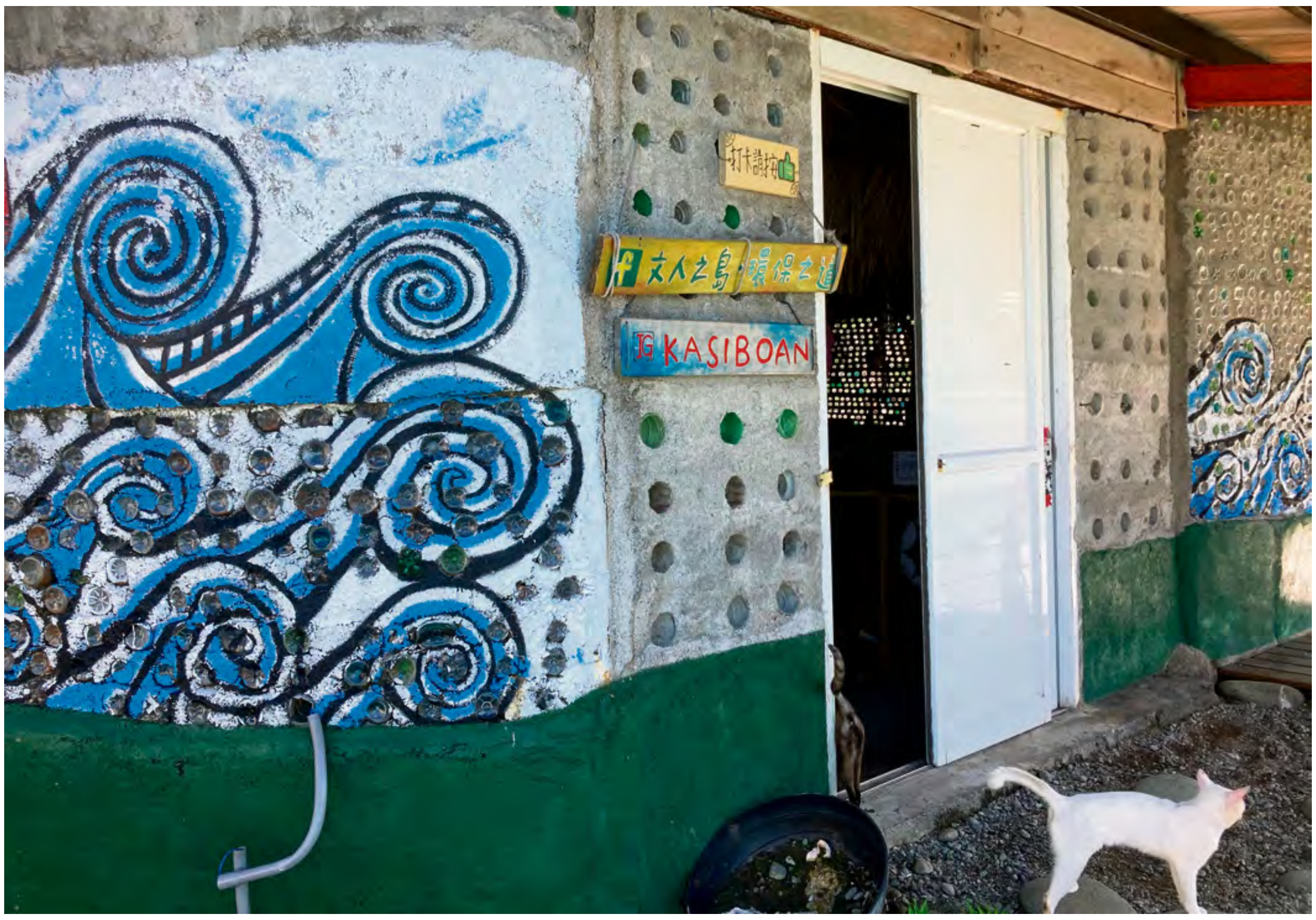


Fig. 3: The *Kasiboan*, or "garbage place in beautiful bay." A sign on the concrete shed explains (in both Chinese and English): *Orchid Island must ship its garbage to Taiwan for disposal. But recently tourist numbers have grown, and the trash has been building up month by month. Now there is just too much for the island to absorb, and the trash is slowly becoming an "attraction spot". That's why we hope all of you who love Orchid Island will carry all your trash with you when you go. Help the garbage vacate the island! Your actions will determine whether Orchid Island is the beautiful island of flying fish, or simply a land of litter.* (Photo by Annika Pissin, 2023)

Living with tourism

With tourism comes increased demand for the goods and services that tourists expect – e.g., the 'necessities' of daily life found in such abundance in Taiwan, on the shelves of 7-Eleven stores. In spite of local protests, a 7-Eleven convenience store was opened in 2014 adjacent to the Kaiyuan Port near the village of Yayo. This was the first chain store from Taiwan to enter the island, and it affected many islanders' consumption habits. A second 7-Eleven was established in the village of Iranmeylek on the east coast of Orchid Island in 2017. Perhaps more than anything else, these chain stores have made daily life on Orchid Island and in Taiwan more and more similar. In the end, people find it increasingly difficult to distinguish the unique local culture of Orchid Island. This should concern us.

Although tourism has increased our income, we continue to steadfastly follow Ta-u cultural traditions such as the "Summoning Flying Fish" rituals, as well as respect for the ocean and traditional taboos. In Iratay (and other villages as well) we prohibit some tourist activities during the flying fish season. There is a notice board erected at the vanuwa (beach) instructing: "It is the Flying Fish Season from February to June. Visitors are requested to please respect traditional culture. Swimming, playing in the water, and snorkeling are prohibited here during this season. Thank you."

Tourism has led to increased awareness of the need for environmental protection. A good example of this is A-Wen (Syaman Nglikned) of the Yeyin (Ivalino) village. A-Wen returned home in 2010 and saw environmental degradation on the island. The massive material flows of tourism resulted in large volumes of imported waste overflowing into the environment. Seeing the local government's inaction, A-Wen began to collect waste on his own land in 2016. With volunteers he set up a simple resource recycling station, including an art exhibition using recycled materials. He also set up a flying fish drying rack art installation called "Plastic Bottle Flying Fish" next to the road. The recycling station was renamed "Kasiboan" ("garbage place in beautiful bay," Ta-u language). While fulfilling a practical solution to a rapidly growing problem, it also served as an environmental education station to increase awareness of the need to protect the small island environment. His voluntary work promoting plastic bottle recycling and cleaning the beach has influenced many local people's awareness of environmental issues.[1]

In summary, t-ourism has given rise to many impacts and issues that call for solutions. From the perspective of Ta-u culture – the Ta-u people's deep-seated sustainability and resilience in interacting with their natural island environment – the accumulated experience in island governance provides a foundation for the future with adapted and integrated strategies. We create a mode of survival suitable for our island home. My father, Tung Sen-Yong (Syapen Lamuran), an elder of the Iratay, expressed a view common among elders: "The development of tourism on our island has had considerable impact on the culture, concepts, customs, politics, environmental protection, and other aspects of our people; indeed, it has driven changes in our Ta-u society. But it has also opened a door for us to learn about the outside world and, simultaneously, cherish our culture and self-governance. I have faith in the future generations of Ta-u people who will decide for themselves where our island will go, bring Orchid Island into a good future, and reconnect our island with soul and peace."

Through the cyclical annual rituals centred on our Flying Fish culture, we hope the culture of oceanic Ta-u people can be passed on so that the island where the Ta-u live can survive sustainably. Ta-u people's talents, skills, management, communal social system, and worldview can be mutually reinforcing. We hope that our mode of governance on Orchid Island can adequately respond to the external forces of modernity and resist the interferences of national systems.

Characteristics of Tourism on Orchid Island in the 1980s and 2010s

	1980s	2010s
Duration	Three days two nights	Three days two nights
Accommodation	Lanyu Hotel, Yayo Inn	B&B or family inns operated by Ta-u owners
Activities	Sightseeing around the island by bus	Snorkeling, ecotours, hiking to volcanic crater, night wildlife observation in forest, riding motorcycle around the island
Transportation	Small aircraft, passenger and cargo ships	Small aircraft, passenger ships
Ownership	Investors from outside	Local Ta-u people
Profits	Travel agencies, Lanyu Hotel, Yayo Hotel	Local B&B operators, tour guides, resTa-urant owners
Tour guides	Taiwanese tour guides on bus tours in larger groups	Mainly Ta-u guides and interpreters in smaller groups

Syaman Lamuran lives in Iratay. He left the island at age 13 to pursue education in Taiwan and the United States. He returned in 2005 and commenced PhD studies in Geography at National Taiwan Normal University, while constructing his home, which now doubles as a B&B. Currently, he is actively involved in projects with the Indigenous Education and Indigenous Knowledge System Management Center, continuing his commitment to preserving and promoting Indigenous wisdom and heritage.
Email: lamuran@gmail.com

Notes

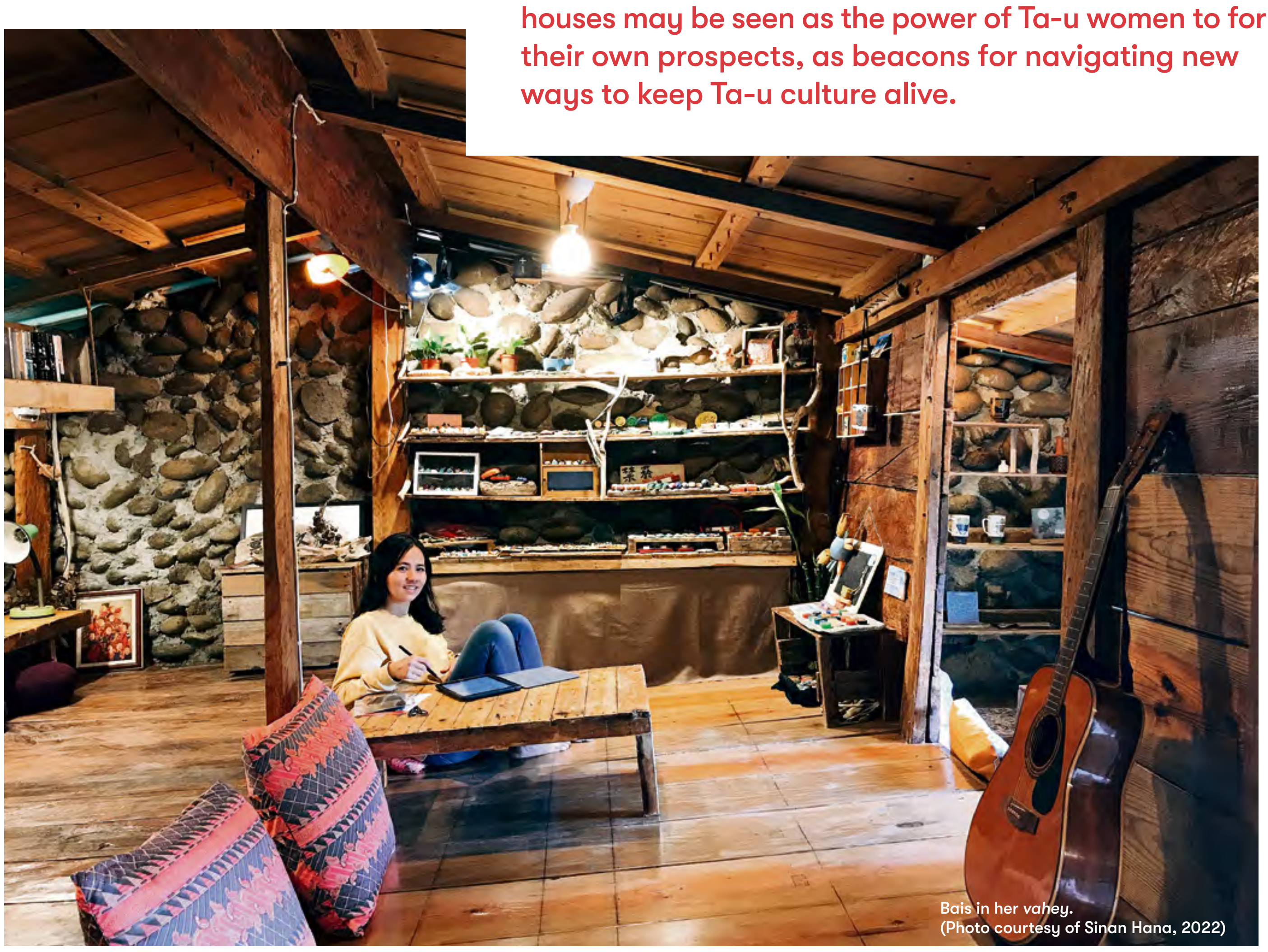
1 https://smiletaiwan.cw.com.tw/article/775

Bais and *Vahey*

Transforming a Traditional House

Sinan Hana

Ta-u men are in charge of building houses. A woman doing so implies a curse of having no men in the household. But cultures change, and nowadays islanders mostly live in cement houses instead of the traditional, semi-underground houses made of stone and wood *(vahey)*. Rather than being considered a display of lack of men in a cursed family, women building and transforming houses may be seen as the power of Ta-u women to form their own prospects, as beacons for navigating new ways to keep Ta-u culture alive.



Bais in her *vahey*.
(Photo courtesy of Sinan Hana, 2022)

My birth name was Bais
it means corner
I was born in my parents' house
at a corner in Iraraley
later I asked my dad for the true meaning of my name
he said: grandpa wanted you to go to all corners of the world and bring the knowledge you learn back home
at that time father said this with a smile
but I still liked this name very much

when I came back to Lanyu, to my parents' place, to give birth
I had saved a little money to give to my brother and cousin
to build a temporary house for my return
where I could get shelter from the wind and rain
I didn't know what the house would look like
when I arrived and opened the door
I knew that this was the style I liked

drawing simple design plans
I renovated the house together with my husband
occasionally I went with my father to set up a booth at the beach
dad displayed his own handicrafts
I displayed postcards I drew

because my belly was getting bigger and heavier
and the heat made my father feel ill
I asked my father whether we shouldn't display our arts and crafts at home
this is how we started to operate The Corner Café
slowly some people started to know about The Corner Café
now in business over eight years

since I came back to Pongso no Ta-u, more and more young people have returned to their home villages
there are more and more B&Bs and shops every year
originally what I saw planted were taro and sweet potato fields
now many plant houses

several times I have gone back to the school where I studied in childhood
to share the story of *The Corner Cafe and Art Hub* established with the help of family and friends by renovating an old traditional house
I asked the children what do you want to do in your hometown in the future?
some students replied – I want to build a B&B like my parents
other students wanted to sell beverages and so on

at the same time I have watched the demolition of one traditional house
after the other and the construction of concrete houses
it seems a pity
yet doesn't everyone need a place to stay when they return?
and they keep coming back
of course they have to deal with reality first
children's school tuition and other fees, car loans and housing loans
facts of life one must face
even if you, like me, feel it's a pity
and so I opened a shop
and noticed more and more students and professors visiting the island
but I never knew what they were studying

because my father's health waned
I bought a piece of land for my 32nd birthday
and started building a new house at the age of 33
in order to prove to my father that girls can live by their own efforts
he passed away before the house was completed

Steep stairs lead down to the entrance
of a *vahey*. (Photo by Annika Pissin, 2023)

in my youth I joined the return migration service team
like many indigenous youth I participated in the projects of college students and their teachers
we took courses together on the island for two months
I also made a documentary film
our group discussed *vahey*
the underground house everyone talks about
discussions suggested that within ten years all houses will have been replaced by cement
you won't see the sea
year after year just like *vahey*
the sea view will gradually disappear

I also travelled abroad in those years
to Europe, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Philippines
to study plans and designs of old houses
in my mind's eye a house plays an essential role
allowing people to feel at ease
when I see things that this eye tells me edifies this role
I add them to the house
I believe this enhances the sustainability and longevity of my house
so I named it *mey vazay do vahey* (Work Space at Home)

these years have been difficult
because of being a woman
for it is considered a man's work to build houses and boats
women cannot interfere because there are different jobs for men and women in Ta-u culture
if women do men's work it signals that there are no men in the family
that there are no boys or men in a family signifies a curse
since I have brothers, uncles, and husband
my working on building a house conveys disrespect toward them
in addition to signals from family members there have been many public opinions whispered in my ears concerning my work renovating the traditional semi-underground house

nevertheless I stubbornly insisted on telling my uncle and mother that I planned to renovate my grandma's house
"if the child is not afraid of hard work, let her do it
she has been arguing about this for many years"
so it happened
after many long conversations with my parents and my uncle
I renovated my family's lovely old house

the external structure was still very good and strong
what was needed was a complete overhaul of the inside
with a mere 20,000 TWD for the project I had to do it in an inexpensive way
the only skilled work we needed done was drawing in electricity for the air conditioner
if I needed a table I built a table
if I didn't have a lamp or some part or component
or if there was something I lacked
I went to the beach
the beach is like an IKEA store
so 80 percent of the interior is recycled stuff mostly from the beach
the interior is in a constant state of ongoing decoration

Bais and her friend constructing a vahey.
(Photo courtesy of Sinan Hana, 2022)

most of the conflicts with my uncle were about whether to prioritise renovating inside or outside
I spent most of my time renovating the interior
but uncle insisted that the exterior of the house must be taken care of first
an untidy house or taro field means the owner is lazy
outer appearance is important for the Ta-u
but I personally feel that inner meaning and tone are more important than outer appearances
consequently I often had disputes with my uncle

being able to organise *vahey* myself
I am more fortunate than many people and filled with gratitude
to my uncle for helping to extend the water pipes from his home to mine
to my brother for helping install the faucet
to my mother for helping me weed around the house
to my husband's grandmother for making pillowcases out of old cotton quilts
to my brother for helping with the cement to make a sink
to my husband for helping to make the nine-square grid in the wall
and for helping fetch stones at the beach to renovate the stone houses
just as our ancestors had carried stones one by one from the seashore
the wood of the house walls is from trees planted by our ancestors
every stone wooden floor beam and pillar is the love left by our ancestors
for our children and grandchildren to share

to be replaced by concrete houses
I did not really want that
so I kept on fixing the old house
and the whole family helped
it was not just me who gave it new life
the love of the whole family was infused into *vahey*

my father said that one can see that this house is not popular
you can tell if a house is full of people by the shining floor
and there must continuously be someone's spiritual aura
this is the right way to treat *vahey* – it is not only a house but a home

although guided tours can be a source of income
they serve a one-time function
a person who goes on a tour once will not come back four or five times
so I planned my *vahey* as a multi-functional space
at different times it displays different exhibitions
I think many people will wish to visit *vahey* again and again

The *mey vazay* (Work Space) has held about 20 exhibitions featuring local artists
several young people participated
a next door neighbour said "Sister I want to exhibit photography here is it okay?"
"Of course! I can't wait!"
one after another people contact me
whether for sharing or exhibition

sharing as an amateur motivates me
I wish to create a platform and give the spotlight to people who share their work for the first time
I prefer to work behind the scenes

since I haven't applied for government programs or grants
and I rent the house from my uncle
who is old and does not work
I occasionally charge a small fee for some activities
partly for paying rent and partly to cover house maintenance
eventually I may be able to afford a dehumidifier in order to extend the life of the house

this is the same house I grew up in
like a close relative I care very much for it
if I treat it well I think the house will over time radiate a powerful energy
so powerful that the sharing inside begins to affect people
some people say: "I am a woman like you, and women seem to need more efforts to communicate and coordinate with others in our Ta-u society; but you and your houses encourage me'

I encourage others
it took me 17 years – not 17 days – to gather information, communicate, and coordinate with family
so it was not easy
then some people actually went back to communicate with their families
some tell me they are moved by my sharing
so we must be steadfast to persevere
we gradually encourage each other and grow stronger one by one.

inside *vahey* many good presentations and exhibitions have been shared
photographic exhibitions, picture book sharing, organizer workshops, barista stories, travelogues
think of yourself as a student
listen to the ideas of others

I wrote a picture book illustrated by my friend Yuping
the book is about the interior of *vahey*
it reflects the precious wisdom of my ancestors

there was also a handicraft course on how to be creative with waste from the sea
and another in cooperation with a non-governmental organisation on how to recycle waste oil into handmade environmentally friendly soap
we invite everyone to go to the beach to find materials to make soap containers

I have picked up a lot of flotsam and jetsam along the shore
especially during the pandemic
let everyone turn the waste into whatever they like
bring it back to the main island of Taiwan too

I have also organised several sharing sessions on the the art of making the traditional Ta-u underground houses
my *vahey* has now been open for public visits and art workshops for two years
many times I have shared it
it is like a joyful spiritual banquet

a place of mutual support
because of this the house has a new life

so, waiting for my house to be built years ago
I turned around and created *vahey*
after *vahey* was completed
I continued the paperwork for the house to be built
and now we live there

Bais/Corner is my pillar
I use the café to support my ideals without applying for funds
because ideals cannot make money
it's about balancing at the spiritual level what you want to do

if the paperwork for the new house I live in now had gone smoothly
I probably would not have created *vahey*
because of the setback I moved on to the important thing

my current name is not Corner *(Bais)* but Sinan Hana
Hana is the Japanese word for flower
but actually it is the name that my mother found in the Bible
to give to my daughter
it means gratitude or gracefulness
I am *Sinan* (mother of) *Hana*

appreciate everything you encounter
good or bad
these are nutrients for life

I went to all corners of the world and blossomed when I returned home

Sinan Hana lives in Iraraley. She worked at a café in Taipei before the call of her roots drew her back to Orchid Island. Today, she manages a cozy café in her village while embarking on the dreams of transforming a traditional underground house into a dynamic art and exhibition forum, infusing new life into age-old traditions.
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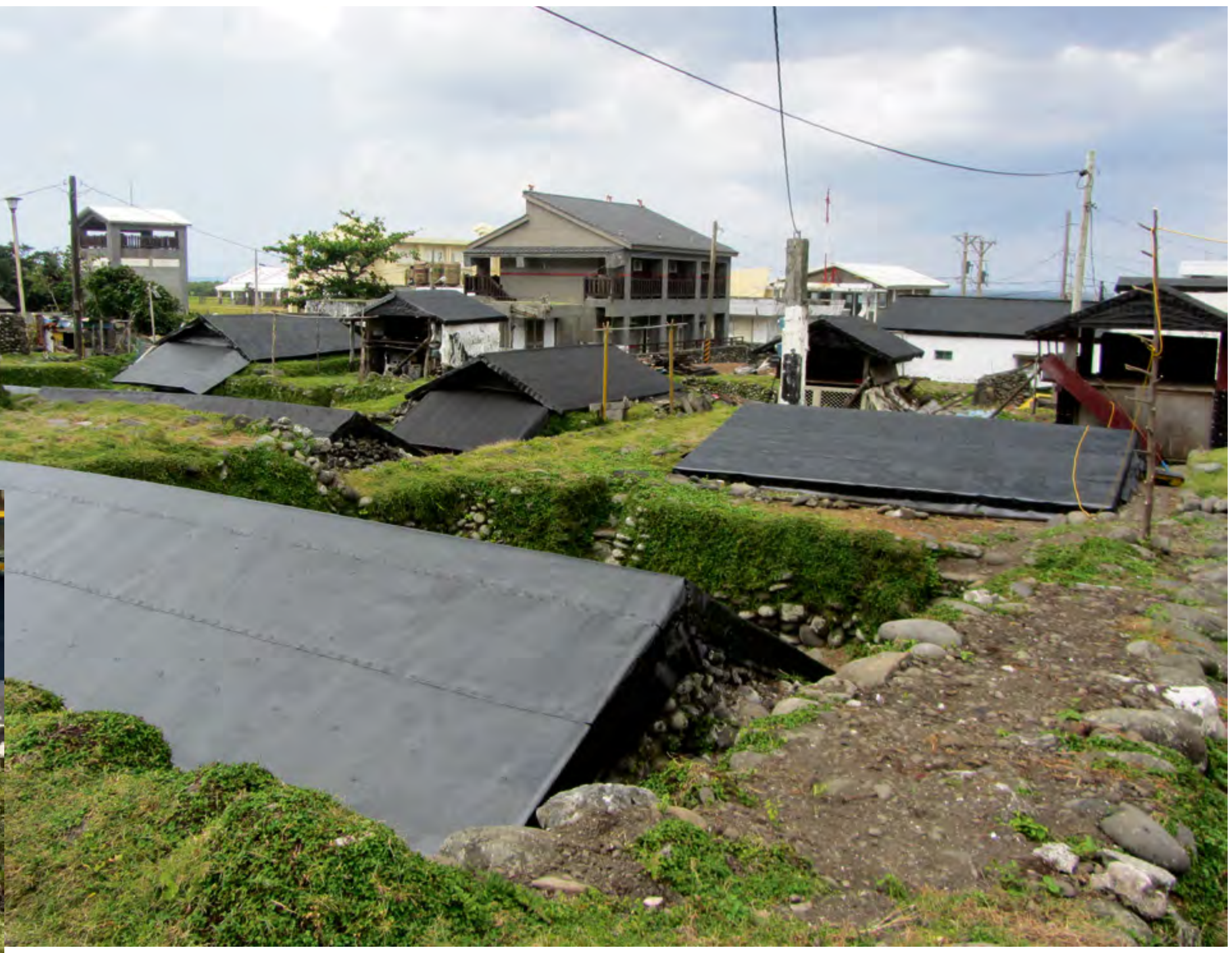
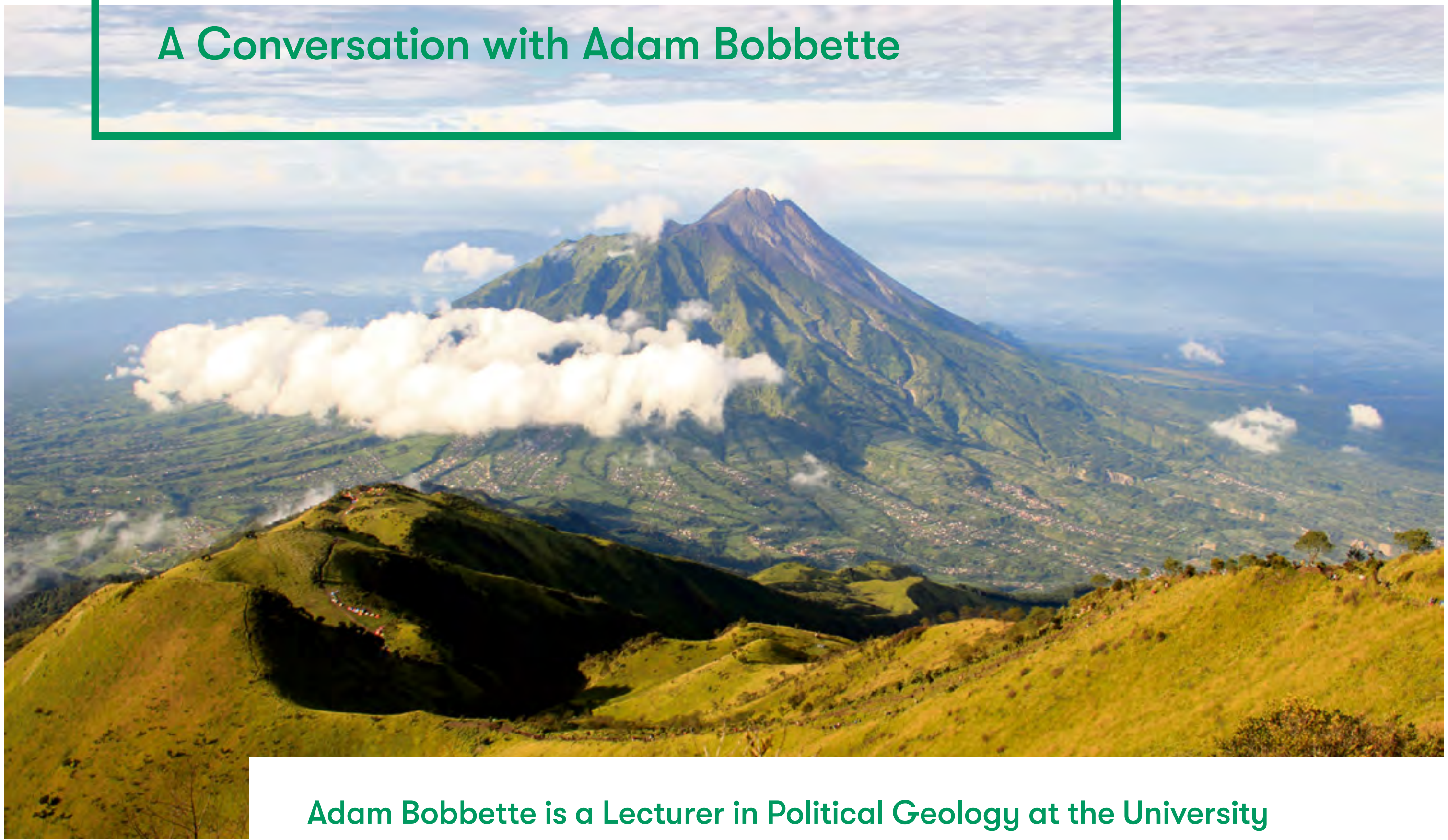


Vahey, traditional underground houses.
(Photos by Huei-Min Tsai, left 2019, above 2013)

Political Geology in Java

A Conversation with Adam Bobbette

The Channel is the flagship podcast from the International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS). Each episode delves into a particular Asian Studies topic from across the social sciences and humanities. Through a mixture of interviews, lectures, discussions, readings, and more, *The Channel* is a platform to connect scholars, activists, artists, and broader publics in sustained conversation about Asia and its place in the contemporary world. Listen and subscribe at https://iias.asia/the-channel or on your preferred podcatcher app.



Adam Bobbette is a Lecturer in Political Geology at the University of Glasgow. His research examines the intersections between politics and environmental and earth sciences, with a special regional focus on Indonesia. In the following conversation, Bobbette offers a unique and transdisciplinary view onto questions of science, imperialism, Indonesian cosmologies, and contemporary politics.

Benjamin Linder: You lecture and specialize in political geology, which is a somewhat uncommon field. How do you define political geology, and how did you come to it academically?

Adam Bobbette: Political geology is pretty new field. You could call it a subfield of human geography, and I came to it really through Anthropocene discourses, which are, of course, quite old at this stage. It was Anthropocene discourses that got me interested in and thinking more about the geological sciences, and about what the geological sciences do in society and in culture. So I began to think about the social and political role of the geological sciences, and was doing so alongside, inspired by, and unexpectedly intersecting with lots of other thinkers. The term *political geology* began to surface simultaneously in a bunch of different places. I'm not exactly sure who used it first. But in 2015, or something like that, I collaborated with Amy Donovan at the University of Cambridge, and we held the first conference on political geology to bring people together to talk about it and to think about it and to try to explore what it could mean. And that turned into an edited volume called *Political Geology: Active Stratigraphies and the Making of Life.*[1] And then subsequently, I just continued working in that space and really came to see it as fundamental to understanding the contemporary world.

BL: That brings us to your new book, *The Pulse of the Earth*, which came out with Duke University Press in 2023.[2] In the book, you're looking at the history of Earth Sciences, and particularly the role that Java, Indonesia played in that story. How did you first come to Java? Why was it such an important place in the earth sciences and in geological thought more broadly?

AB: Well, I first came to Java not being interested in geology per se. I was interested in water and urban politics, and I was doing work around that in Jakarta. And then by accident, I ended up in Central Java in a taxi, and I saw Mount Merapi, where I learned that there were anywhere between one and two million people living on it, and that it was an active volcano. It had been inhabited for who knows how long – centuries, perhaps millennia – and it struck me as a kind of intensified version of what I was seeing in Jakarta. It struck me as a place where we could learn about what it meant to live with volatile nature, unpredictable nature. It's the condition that we all live with now. Ulrich Beck said in the 90s that the risk society is living on the edge of a volcano. He never actually talks about volcanoes anywhere else in that in that text, but that was essentially what I came to think about through my first encounter with Merapi. And that is what set me on the path of thinking about the social life of geology. Merapi is something that's known by geologists. It has been a subject of study by geologists for a very, very long time, and it's also a very special kind of geology because it's volcanic. So it's very active, and that's a much different vision of geology than a lot of people have otherwise. Conventionally, we think of geology as something which is very stable, something which is underfoot, something that is millions or billions of years old. Or it something which is extracted, that we can pull up and reshape and make into something else. A volcano is a very special kind of geology, though, because it's basically a liquid. So the conventional distinctions between solids and liquids really begin to become very ambiguous on volcanoes. So that was also really inspiring to me.

BL: Volcanoes are, of course, a notable feature of the Javanese landscape. What role does volcanology play in the story you're telling – or in the social life of geology, as you described it earlier?

AB: This builds on what I was talking about earlier about how volcanoes are this very special kind of geology, because they're so active. And how that really opens up a different story about the history of the geological sciences than ones we are more familiar with. Volcano science and the geological knowledges associated with volcano science are a different story. You're not looking to extract stuff from volcanoes. You're looking to protect people from their explosions. You're looking to predict when eruptions are going to happen. So it's an anticipatory science, and one which is fundamentally bound up with histories of divination and how it is that we know the future and tell stories about the future. Also, in the context of the Netherlands East Indies, volcanoes were principally of interest because they were destroying the plantations. We all know that the Netherlands East Indies was a plantation economy, one built not on the extraction of ores so much as on the extraction of botanical products. The role of volcano science in that story is really not known generally, but it was profound because volcanoes would erupt and destroy the plantations and shut down the plantation economy. So the emergence of the modern volcano sciences in the world certainly was driven by this attempt to understand how volcanoes worked to be able to manage their eruptions in the Netherlands East Indies, and then that knowledge spread around to other parts of the world.

BL: One thing I really appreciated about your book is that you're not only interested in what Western science and Western scientists did in Java, but also in local cosmologies and their relationship to the earth sciences.

AB: This links back to what I was saying, towards the beginning of our conversation about how I came to this work by trying to understand the social role of the geological sciences. That interest really expanded outwards into how it is that the geological sciences have shaped the narratives that we have inherited about the landscape, and about geological history and the history of the Earth itself. But as I see it, that's not the only function of political geology. The second dimension of it is that the Western geological sciences are not the only knowledges that there have been about geological materials and landscapes, or about the evolutionary history and structure of the earth itself. So the other purpose of political geology is to also open up and expand those narratives about geological materials – how it is that geology relates to humans – and about other conceptions of the role of geological knowledge is in society. So it is to acknowledge the colonial and imperial legacies that are in the geological sciences, absolutely. That's really, really important, but that's not the only way to think about geology. And that's also what is central to the book. A lot of it is spent trying to understand the Javanese spiritual traditions and how they conceptualize geological material and geological processes: the significance of Indonesian Islam in thinking about the history and evolution of the Earth itself, Javanese spiritual topographies and how they make sense of volcanic processes. The next move in that process is to show how they interacted with Western colonial geological sciences, how they, in fact, influenced those sciences, how they are incorporated into the narratives that standard geological sciences have of the earth today.

BL: You use the term intercalation to explore this relationship between these two bodies of knowledge – that is, Western imperial science and local cosmologies. What is the geological meaning of intercalation? And how are you using the concept?

AB: Intercalation is actually a geological term to talk about geological contexts basically made up of mixtures of a whole bunch of different stuff fused together. That's a very, very heterodox description of it, and my geologist colleagues would absolutely despise the way that I just did that. But for those of us who are not trained in the earth and environmental sciences, that's a way to understand intercalation. But another thing that is important about intercalation is that it's made up of bits of fragments from different periods, sort of mushed up side by side. And that's how it would be different from something like stratification, where each layer is a different period. Stratification is linear in its chronology; intercalation is not necessarily linear. So you have different historical bits sort of fused or mashed up together. To me, that seems like a productive way to think about earth knowledges and a productive way to think about the geological sciences – to see them as intercalated, made up of fragments that are quite cosmopolitan, from all sorts of parts of the world. Some of them are kind of translated, some of them are not, they're just taken sort of whole hog and fused in with other bits of knowledge.

This transcript has been heavily edited and abridged. The original audio includes a wealth of further details and discussion. To hear to the full conversation, listen and subscribe to *The Channel* podcast: https://iias.asia/the-channel

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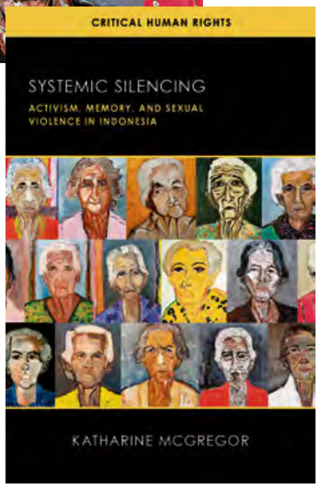
Notes

[1] Bobbette, Adam and Amy Donovan (eds.). 2019. *Political Geology: Active Stratigraphies and the Making of Life.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

[2] Bobbette, Adam. 2023. *The Pulse of the Earth: Political Ecology in Java.* Durham: Duke University Press.

[3] Beck, Ulrich. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity.* London: Sage.



Reckoning with Historical Sexual Violence

A Conversation with Kate McGregor

In the 1930s and 1940s, the Japanese military imposed a system of prostitution across East and Southeast Asia. Since the 1990s, survivors of the system, euphemistically called "comfort women," have sought recognition of and redress for the sexual violence they endured. Kate McGregor's new book – *Systemic Silencing: Activism, Memory and Sexual Violence in Indonesia* – explores this history, its fallout, and ongoing activism of its survivors in the context of Indonesia. Kate McGregor is Professor in Southeast Asian History in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne.

Benjamin Linder: The topic of your book has to do with the system of prostitution that was enforced by the Japanese military during the Asia Pacific War. What can you tell us about this system of prostitution, and specifically about the lives of the women who were victimized by it?

Kate McGregor: The system originated in China in the 1930s. It's often dated to around 1932, and also it was often correlated with the Rape of Nanjing incident. The Japanese military began to organize a system of enforced military prostitution, and this system was organized on the basis of several assumptions, particularly about male soldiers and Japanese soldiers. Those assumptions included the fact that the soldiers needed to have access to sex, basically, so the women were there to provide that sex. Another rationale was that it was meant to protect the health of the soldiers because of the potential for venereal disease. So the plan was to also control the health of these women so that the soldiers would not get infected with venereal diseases. The third kind of rationale was that it would prevent sexual violence against other women. However, all of these rationales actually need to be challenged. First, this assumption about male sexuality is problematic – but also the assumption that it would prevent the rapes of other women, because we know that there was still sexual violence outside of the system. So this was really a bit more of a myth in the end.

The women in the system were "recruited" – I use that word with inverted commas – by various means. That could be women who were already working in sex work, who were forced then to work in this system. It could also include girls and women who were abducted from their homes or the street, or also girls and women who were duped into the system by means of false promises of, for example, education abroad or jobs abroad. Once they were in the system, these girls and women were subjected to daily rape by the soldiers. They had to work long hours to serve the soldiers, and they didn't have control over their work hours. They were also subjected to forced medical checks in order to ensure the protection of the soldiers. And they were also usually held in circumstances of detention – they were not free to leave the places where they were held. So they often had to work six days a week at least, and then they were not free to leave at any time of the day that they wanted to. They were also guarded. In addition, the women were subjected to other forms of physical violence, especially if they tried to resist, they might have been beaten. And some women were taken a long way from their homes – for instance, there were examples of Korean women who ended up in Java.

BL: You mentioned that this very violent system occurred in many places where the Japanese occupied, but your work is particularly concerned with Indonesia. So can you tell us how the system played out specifically in Indonesia during the Japanese occupation there from 1942-1945?

KM: I studied in detail what happened in this territory, which was formerly the Netherlands East Indies but became Indonesia after independence. There were a lot of similarities that I could see with the research that had already been conducted, for example, on China or on Korea in particular. We know that women were subjected to similar methods of "recruitment" to other places. The man who became the president of Indonesia, President Sukarno, famously offered women who'd been working in sex work in the island of Sumatra to be the first women offered to the Japanese soldiers, on the basis that this would protect the honor of other Indonesian women. But there was still this pattern of duping Indonesian girls and women into the system by the Japanese military. There were also patterns of local collaboration as well, which we also know about in China and Korea to various extents. In Indonesia, local collaboration meant things like a village head might be complicit in, for example, "supplying" 20 women at the request of the Japanese military. But as I say in my book, we need to contextualize all of this with the understanding that it was a situation of occupation and coercion. Everybody was probably facing different pressures, but we do know that there was complicity from local people as well. One interesting difference in Indonesia, perhaps, is that several Dutch women also ended up in this system. Around 200 to 300 Dutch women is estimated – were taken from internment camps, so slightly different to the other patterns of "recruitment." But they ended up in similar circumstances in the so-called "comfort stations," where again, they were subjected to being guarded and to limitations on their freedoms, etc.

BL: There seems to be a deep and troubling link between imperial ambitions and sexual violence. In general terms, what was the gender ideology undergirding the kind of hyper-nationalist and expansionist project of Japan in the early 1940s?

KM: I am more of an expert on Indonesia, but I tried to learn as much as I could about Japan in writing this book. The gender ideology was generally characterized by a view that male sexuality – especially the sexuality of soldiers – is characterized by this inherent need for sex, and that women should be available to fulfill this need. So ideas of patriarchy were really accentuated in this system. The same seemed to also apply to not only Japanese soldiers, but also to Japanese civilians who were stationed in the colony. So thinking of that Imperial dimension, there was a sense, in terms of the way that the Japanese approached local society in Indonesia, that everything was there as a resource for them. That's the way they approached the natural resources of the country, but also male labor – in terms of the forced laborers who were required to build railways or infrastructure – and also the women.

BL: Turning back to the women themselves, who were victims of this system? Can you tell us about what their experiences might have been like? What were their lives actually like?

KM: Well, we don't have the complete life stories of many of it is these women, but it would be really interesting to look at the extent to which women of different classes ended up in this system. My assumption would be that people of a certain class may have been able to sometimes have more resources to resist, in terms of whether they could pay somebody or get somebody else to volunteer in their place. So there may have been more capacity to resist, although it was very difficult to resist. You could be met with violence if, for example, the Japanese military identified a woman that they wanted in the system and she resisted. There are some cases where fathers are killed on the spot because they try to resist, so it was very difficult. But in terms of the women who ended up in this system, some of the most striking stories for me were women who maybe were so desperate for work because of the circumstances also of the Japanese occupation. It was so difficult to even find enough to eat, and people wanted to support their families, so that also made women who were in a more economically vulnerable position more likely to perhaps be duped into the system. And then once in the system, I think it depended on whether they were taken far from home or whether they were in their local society. Some women, as I said, were taken far from home, and that might have made a difference in terms of whether they had any contact with their family at all. For some women who were very young girls and women, this also could have potentially been their first sexual experience. So I think it was very traumatic for a lot of the women, but it's also evident that from the start of their experience – although a lot of the experiences and narrated many years later – a lot of women almost immediately felt shame about what had happened to them. Even though they were not to blame, they still blame themselves because of ways of understanding sexuality and the expectation that women must guard their morality. So I think there was almost immediately this process of self-blaming and feeling shame about what had happened to the women.

BL: This is obviously a really dark story with a lot of trauma involved. What was the experience of doing this research and writing about these women's experiences like for you?

KM: Yes, I must acknowledge it is an incredibly difficult topic. But if there is something more positive about this story, it is the fact that I tried to also cover survivor activists. The women that I focus on – some of them did try to voice their experiences and to turn around those feelings of shame into a feeling of actually "No, I was wronged." For me, that's an incredibly important story. The other more positive side of this story is the solidarity that this movement generated, including between people from Indonesia and people from Japan. So yes, the first half of this book – where I do talk about the women's experiences and really draw out what happened to them – is quite harrowing material. But, again, I think I just felt a sense of responsibility to contextualize this story, and to tell this story as much as I could.

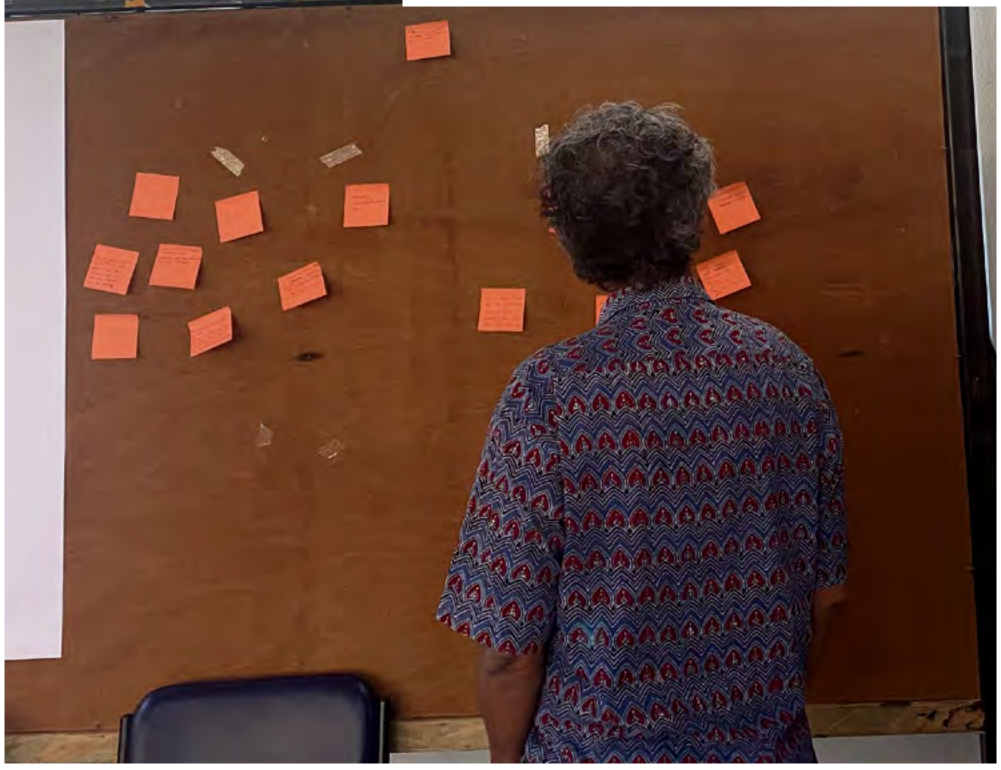
This transcript has been heavily edited and abridged. The original audio includes a wealth of further details and discussion. To hear to the full conversation, listen and subscribe to *The Channel* podcast: https://iias.asia/the-channel

Place-Based Education and Community Storytelling

“The Slate” is devoted to pedagogy and educational praxis, both in and beyond the classroom. This section is meant to be a space for educators and researchers to explore the debates, practices, challenges, and opportunities of 21st-century education. “The Slate” can take many forms, encompassing everything from personal reflections to practical resources for educators (e.g., syllabi, field exercises, etc.), from critical essays on traditional education to experimental teaching strategies. With this section, we seek perspectives that decolonize conventional curricula and pedagogies. Through socially and civically engaged approaches, the section aims to foster alternative models for education that are grounded in contemporary experience and which strive towards greater accessibility, innovation, and critical engagement.

Yi Li, Surajit Sarkar, Tharaphi Than, and Jyothi Thrivikraman

How can education continue in times of crisis? What is the role of education in precarity? How can learning materials engage students’ own communities, histories, and surrounding environments? Our project (“Place-based Education and Community Storytelling”) grew out of a desire to answer these questions, but also to address current educational challenges in Myanmar. Starting in January 2023, a group of scholars from the Humanities *Across* Borders (HAB) network and their colleagues began working with educators and content-creators in Myanmar to help them integrate place-based education and storytelling methods into their work. We saw the value of this innovative place-based pedagogy to support emergency education by the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) in resource-limited grassroots schools and informal classrooms. Encouraging alternative learning methods through storytelling, we hope to capture learners’ stories, preserve endangered memories independent from the junta’s discourse, and create alternative, student-led teaching materials that valorise local identities.



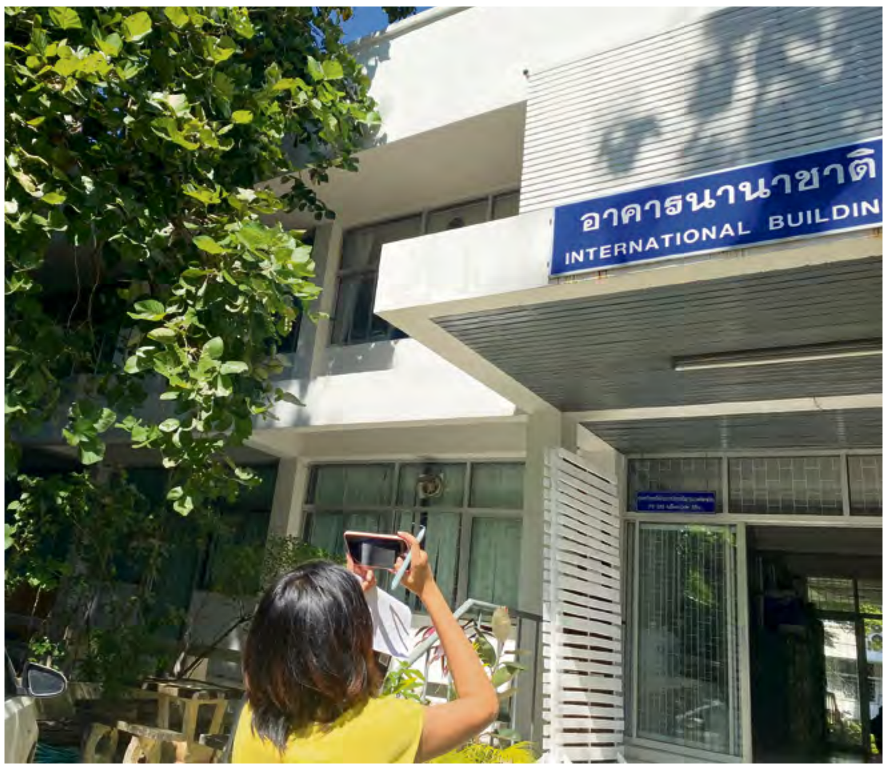


Fig. 1-3: Snapshots from the event “Community Storytelling and Place-based Education: Learning with Memory Workshop” in Chiang Mai, Thailand. (Photos by the authors, 2023)

Since the 2021 military coup, many students have been boycotting what they call ‘military slave education’ (စစ်ကျွန်ပညာရေး or *sit kyun pyinyayay*). The World Bank (2023) estimates that only 22 percent of eligible students are enrolled in high school level studies in Myanmar. The educational crisis is particularly severe in ethnic autonomous areas along Myanmar’s borders, as well as in heartland areas such as Sagaing, where ongoing armed resistance is most intense and where the coup reinvigorated socio-economic marginalisation and cultural-political oppression.

This idea first emerged during HAB’s international “Craft as Method” workshop in Saint Louis, Senegal.[1] At the workshop, Tharaphi Than from Northern Illinois University (United States) shared photos of students watching educational videos in caves to access non-military education. The photos were meant not merely to elicit sympathy, but rather to serve as a call to action. How can we respond collectively and support these individuals? Surajit Sarkar, an oral historian from Delhi (India) shared his work on community storytelling as a pedagogical resource with attending scholars, including Tharaphi and Jyothi Thrivikraman from Leiden University College (the Netherlands). In the following months, Yi Li from Aberystwyth University (United Kingdom) joined the effort, and a consensus was reached to organise training workshops for teachers from Myanmar.

Thus, in June 2023, the workshop “Underground Educators of Myanmar and What We Can Learn From Them” took place at the International Institute for Asian Studies.[2] Subsequently, a five-week online course was held in October-November 2023, supported by The Worlds We Want (TWWW) research hub at Aberystwyth University. Through these events, we gained valuable experience in facilitating training activities and designing course materials. We paid particular attention to the special requirements of Myanmar teachers who asked for tailored, accessible content and activities, methods to encourage discussion among members of different backgrounds, and materials with a mixture of English and Burmese languages. This culminated, most recently, in an intensive, in-person, four-day training workshop, “Community Storytelling and Place-based Education: Learning with Memory Workshop.”[3] The workshop took place at the Regional Centre for Social Science (RCSD), Chiang Mai University, between 28 November and 1 December 2023, with four facilitators and 21 trainees living in Myanmar and Thailand.

The trainees were diverse in terms of region, religion, ethnicity, profession, age, and gender. Yet, despite the huge differences, they shared a common vision of resisting military rule by continuing education in their respective communities. Many participants were in their 20s and had thus endured disruptions to their own tertiary education in 2021. Since then, they have led a volatile, and sometimes precarious, life in the resistance movement. For them, the Chiang Mai workshop was their first time back on a university campus. The normality itself was overwhelming, and their dedication to this learning opportunity – especially while undergoing personal and collective traumas – was humbling. In an activity on the first day, we organised a short campus tour with specific tasks, and these young participants were clearly enjoying the walk, not only as a group activity aiming to practise the development of place-based materials, but also as an immersion in normal campus life with peers.

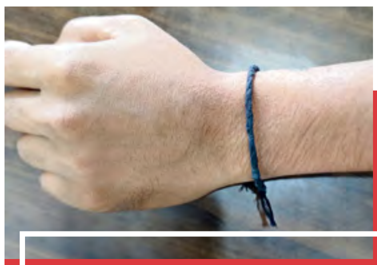
For this hands-on workshop, much effort was dedicated to activities, which were supported by short ‘lecture’ sessions outlining necessary theories and context. This was vital for keeping the thread focused, and to avoid trainees becoming confused and overwhelmed. Each day, two or three individual or group activities were conducted

either inside the classroom or on-site (e.g., the campus tour). Such activities were guided by various prompts, including 'tell the story of your name,' 'draw a map between your home and the market,' and 'storyboard a recent visit.' All of this enabled the trainees to experience storytelling and place-based learning in a multi-sensory manner, as well as to see first-hand how teachers facilitate and navigate these sorts of pedagogical activities.

One session was based on trainees' personal objects. This proved to be particularly moving and opened up space for the students to discuss their own personal histories, but it also highlighted the power of stories about place. In this activity, groups comprised four trainees, each one of whom was assigned a role: one interviewer, one interviewee, and two note-takers. Here, interviewees, upon the guided prompts of the interviewer, answered questions about an everyday object brought to the workshop. The focus of this activity was practising interviewing, observing, and sharing stories. Each role in the group emphasised certain skills. The outcome of this two-hour exercise was a collection of simple yet moving stories associated with their recent lives and with strong emotional resonances.

As a training workshop dedicated to marginal communities, the use of language in the classroom is not only a communication tool but a symbol of power, dominance, and differential access to knowledge. Indeed, beyond the dichotomy of English and Burmese, there were undercurrents of sub-power associated with non-Burmese languages among ethnic trainees, whose own native languages such as Kachin, Karenni, and Mon were hardly represented in the classroom. This dynamic reflected the linguistic and ethnic complexity in Myanmar in general, and indeed among many resistance groups on the ground. To acknowledge the gap and to give voice to the trainees, facilitators quickly adjusted the language strategy and left the final assignment on the fourth day to be led entirely by trainees themselves. Here, each trainee presented a story of their own life, in a language chosen by themselves. This proved a great boost to classroom participation and engagement. Each person gave a passionate story that was close to their heart, igniting discussion on the topic and on storytelling techniques – much to the appreciation of the facilitators, now taking a backseat in order to let the stories and thoughts flow in the most comfortable way for all. Facilitators sat to the side of the room and had the stories translated (by an assistant on the computer so that live translation was happening in the background); we interjected as necessary but most of the feedback came from the participants themselves.

The four-day workshop concluded with trainees expressing their positive learning outcomes and their willingness to apply these newly learned methods within their respective communities. Stories generated during the sessions will be compiled, translated, and published as alternative learning materials, and the publication will also serve for the rest of the world as a valuable record of the hopes and struggles



Whispers of the Reminiscence

Mi Lai

Reminiscence involves a multitude of emotions – the good, the bad, the sadness, the happiness, and the yearnings. For me, it is wrapped in a piece of my mother's *longyi*. She gave it to me before my journey in accordance with our tradition, and now it serves as a reminder of yearning and longing for home.

Even though things are going well in the present, I find myself longing for my mother and my home in Anyar region. Even without sufficient electricity and water supply,
I feel that being with my family will bring me a sense of safety and comfort. I have made the decision to return home one day, while my mother is still alive.

I often think about those who, like me, are separated from their homes due to conflicts in our country. My heart goes out to them, and I pray for their well-being and reunion with their loved ones. For me, this piece of longyi holds immense value for me since it holds an intimate connection with my family.

Do You Believe That Objects Have Souls, Too?

HWM

Do you believe that objects have souls, too? I believe they do because of a particular object: my sandal. It was a gift from my friend, Kay Kayy. I met Kay Kayy at a very strange time in my life. Six months after our country, Myanmar, fell under dictatorship, I joined the resistance and went to a liberated area in the far south of the country. I met Kay Kayy there. She had been there before my arrival. She was short, smart, hardworking, kind, and hot-headed. She had a deep affection for the 'Snoopy' character. We bonded over art, literature, and a zero-tolerance policy towards sexism – our shared interests. We became sisters not by blood, but by spirit. I looked up to her as she protected me like family. Together, we faced challenges and took care of each other.

As a present for my 21st birthday, she gave me a sandal – durable, lightweight, and comfortable for hiking, knowing my previous footwear caused me difficulties. One day, she had to go on a work trip, promising to be back with my favourite snacks by the same night. However, she never returned. She was seized by the military on her way. I couldn't believe it. Since we lived together in the same barrack, it became my duty to clear out her things. How could I? I told myself she would come back, living in denial. The image of her wearing her favourite Snoopy T-shirt, assuring me she would return, remained in my mind. It took me a month to realise she wouldn't return. The only person who made me feel at home was gone.

I was wearing the sandal when I heard the news of her getting sentenced to seven years in prison. I wear the sandal all the time – in the jungle, in the mountains, through the mud, and on concrete roads. Whenever I wear it, I feel that she's with me. It has become a part of me. So, I have to say, I believe objects have souls, too.

of a young generation from Myanmar. The training protocol will be developed as a toolkit for educators in conflict/displaced areas. The workshop in the tranquil campus under the revered and beautiful Doi Suthep of Chiang Mai city provided a much-needed occasion for these young, dedicated activists to cultivate new connections and new friendships, and to resume – even if temporarily – a life that was cruelly denied to them by political repression.

The Chiang Mai workshop and its aforementioned preparatory sessions have been an invaluable learning process for everyone involved. The inspiration was mutual, and we facilitators have learned as much as the trainees, if not more. While community storytelling and place-based education have been implemented in locations across the world over the years, the key issue is to sensibly adjust to each community with its unique needs. As scholars with mixed experiences in the Global North and South, all of us have previously worked with communities at the margins, both in our research and our practice. Yet in implementation, we are often affected by institutional habits that have been dominated by the North despite conscious efforts to adjust otherwise. Taking this further, and incorporating the twice-daily course correction feedback, the language of the workshop switched to Burmese on the last day, forcing us facilitators to follow and respond through the human and digital translation services available. This handed over the space in multiple ways to the participants, an act so empowering that many participants mentioned it in their feedback, and so did we as organisers.

The possibility of developing place-based stories – and of helping participants draw out psychologically fragile and traumatic experiences from the violence and displacement of their lives – made this workshop unique. For example, the sounds of aeroplanes and fireworks (it was the annual Loy Krathong festival in Thailand) made some initially fearful. It was evident that participants were trying to process their recent pasts in their own ways in the relative security of Chiang Mai. Why should stories of hurt, suffering, even death need to be told? Did they matter? How should they be told? This emerged a number of times among the participants themselves. Such questions gave trainees time to process their thoughts and words, while we facilitators tried to reassure them that this was legitimate, that their stories do, in fact, matter. The challenges they face will persist, but so will their struggle to continue fighting for a better place. And throughout the four days, we had difficult conversations about language, power, and privilege amongst the group. These discussions were needed, and we must sit in spaces of uncomfortableness to unlearn and learn. We don't know what the future holds for these participants. They may not know either. But our small actions made a difference, and perhaps that is all for the moment. And perhaps this is a call for us all to find the power in small actions.

Epilogue: Three months after the workshop, participants are working as groups, compiling stories from their communities, finding ways to incorporate them into teaching and public education. Our workshop has an intangible outcome: empowering the participants to see that their world is knowable, and that it is worth knowing by people beyond Myanmar.

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All object stories translated from Burmese to English by HWM.

Notes

1 https://humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog/craft-method-vignettes-and-fragments-part-1
2 https://humanitiesacrossborders.org/events/underground-educators-myanmar-and-what-we-can-learn-them
3 This event was supported by a CLAS summer grant at Northern Illinois University, Worlds We Want Research Hub at Aberystwyth University, Leiden University College, Thinking Classroom Foundation, Chiang Mai University, and Humanities Across Borders (IIAS, Leiden University).

My Dearest Silicone Friend

Shayi

I'm Miss Manaw, known as the smooth talker, and I was born in a rural area in Kachin. As the eldest of four siblings, I've always been prioritised by my parents and relatives. From birth, I've tended to be obsessive and assertive in ways of getting what I want. However, as I grew older, I came to see these traits as both my strengths and weaknesses. During my teenage years, I experienced an eventful story that I'd like to share. When I was younger, my hair was healthy and strong. However, as my family size grew and my parents became busier with my younger siblings, I began to pay less attention to my hygiene. Eventually, I discovered that lice had infested my once shiny, dark hair, and seeing those lice filled me with shame and worries. Despite trying different shampoos and combs, I couldn't find a solution. This experience taught me the importance of choosing the right tools and products to maintain my hair, especially as it began to suffer damage.

During that time, I discovered my saviour: a silicone comb, which I read about in a review on social media. Unfortunately, it was only available in Yangon and not in rural areas like mine. Fortunately, I had relatives from Yangon who were visiting our area in Kachin. I seized the opportunity and asked them to bring me the silicon comb that I desperately needed.

When I tried the silicone comb, it felt like a perfect fit for me. Not only did it solve the lice problem, but it also provided additional benefits. The soft texture while combing and the gentle massage it gave to my scalp were remarkable. It stood out from other types of combs, bringing me immense satisfaction. I've been using this silicone comb for over a decade now, since my teenage years, and I've decided to continue using it for the rest of my life. It's truly become a crucial part of my hair care routine.

Through the Inferno

Khatsitt

I am an undocumented person living in Mae Sot, Thailand. One day, I was selected for a workshop in Bangkok. Since I don't have any documentation, I couldn't travel legally. So, most of my journey was about walking, hiking, and hitchhiking. The logistics person of the journey didn't communicate about the route in advance. The journey turned out to be a tough 40-kilometre trek lasting over ten hours. I only brought a backpack, but my companion brought three backpacks, a violin, and a stand. So, I had to help him carry them.

Our journey began from Mae Sot to a village near Phopra, by car with three transit points in between. After that, we started the hike with the guide at ten in the morning. After five hours of hiking, we came across a stream. Seeing it brought me a sense of relief, even though my body was covered in mud. Feeling uncertain about how much further we had to go, we communicated with the guide to learn our whereabouts, but the language barrier was difficult to get through. Despite this, we still had the energy in our bodies and water in our bottles to continue. After passing the stream, we were handed over to a different local guide. Contrary to our expectations to continue by car, we had to press on with our hike in the heavy rain. The slippers on my feet, combined with the weight of two backpacks, caused me to lose my balance repeatedly. By the time we reached the top of one of the mountains, I had no energy left. My limbs felt heavy, and my body begged for rest. Despite this, the guide gestured that a wild animal, a tiger, was nearby. With no mobile service in the middle of nowhere, I had no choice but to keep moving.

Later, a sense of thirst consumed me, and I reached for my water bottle, which I borrowed from my friend who lived with me in Mae Sot, only to find it empty. With each step, I struggled to carry my legs, stumbling frequently along the way. The thirst grew increasingly powerful, driving me to drink whatever water I could find – whether it was unclean water drops on leaves, or even the condensation on the surface of the water bottle itself. In that moment, as my body desperately sought hydration, I truly understood the value of water.

It was 18:30 when we reached a trail between a ravine and a bank. To our horror, we discovered a dead body in the bush beside the trail, surrounded by swarms of flies. The stench was so overpowering that I was forced to run after the guide and the companion, who were already 20 yards ahead of me. In my haste, I even lost my slippers along the way. With only 75 percent battery left on my phone, we relied on its flashlight as we continued walking, stumbling, and struggling along the rough terrain.

As the agony neared its end, we were relieved to come across another stream. Despite my concerns about my phone battery dropping below 20 percent, I filled my water bottle from the stream and drank deeply. With a heavy heart, I looked around my surroundings and noticed gutters, hinting at the end of our journey – an inferno.

After walking for some time, we finally reached the end of our journey, where a tractor awaited us, ready to transport us out of our misery. As the clock struck 21:35 on October 6, 2023, we breathed a sigh of relief, grateful to have survived the arduous trek.

The Diverse Experiences of Refugee Groups in Northeast Asia

Ilhong Ko

Due to the sensitive geopolitical situation of Northeast Asia, the borders of its respective nation-states are difficult to cross unless authorized by the government. Cross-border flows not sanctioned by the government, such as the movement of North Korean refugees or illegal migrant workers, have nevertheless been a visible aspect of human migration in the region since the turn of the millennium. However, recent conflicts in places located beyond Northeast Asia have led to a previously unwitnessed type of human movement into the region, involving displaced people from Yemen, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Russia. Due to a series of circumstances – some of which are historical and path-dependent, and others of which are purely of chance – it is in South Korea that these displaced people have found refuge; the number of those who have settled in the other nation-states of Northeast Asia is negligible.[1]

The contributions to this issue of *News from Northeast Asia* address the diverse experiences of refugee groups in South Korea. In "It's Taking a Whole Village to Raise Children: A Focused Study on the Afghan Refugees in Ulsan, South Korea," Gi Yeon Koo of Seoul National University Asia Center presents the case of the Afghan 'people of special merit.' Koo notes how the lessons learned from the public's reactions to Yemeni refugees were considered in the process of accepting refugees from Afghanistan. Presenting a stark contrast to the case of the Afghan refugees is that of the refugees from Ukraine, who are mostly ethnic Koreans. Their experiences are examined in detail by Ka Young Ko of Seoul National University Asia Center in "The Hospitality and Limitations of South Korea for the Ukrainian Refugees." Finally, the issue of "Why Don't Russian *Relokants* (War Immigrants) Choose South Korea as their Place of Permanent Residence?" is addressed by Vadim Slepchenko of Seoul National University Asia Center. The contents of, and issues raised by, these pieces can be used to understand the wider socio-political and socio-economic outcomes and consequences that can occur for refugees across Northeast Asia.

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Notes

[1] The exception being Russian *relokants* in Mongolia.

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.

It's Taking a Whole Village to Raise Children: A Focused Study on the Afghan Refugees in Ulsan, South Korea

Gi Yeon Koo

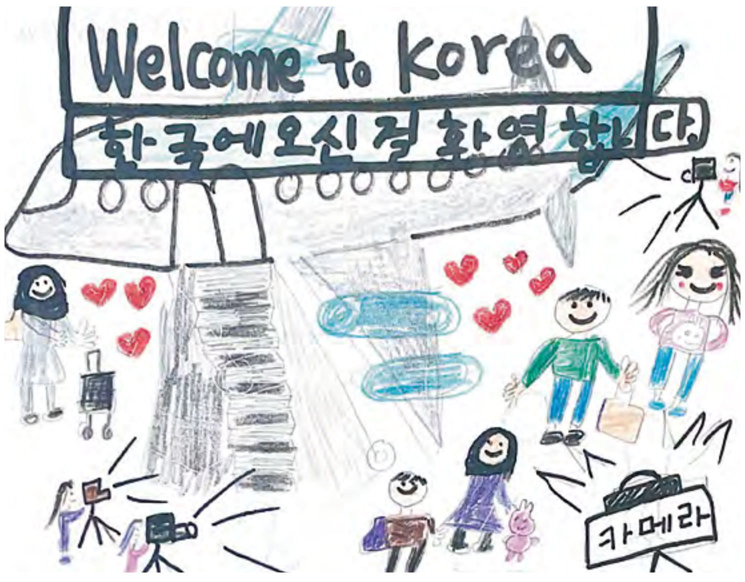
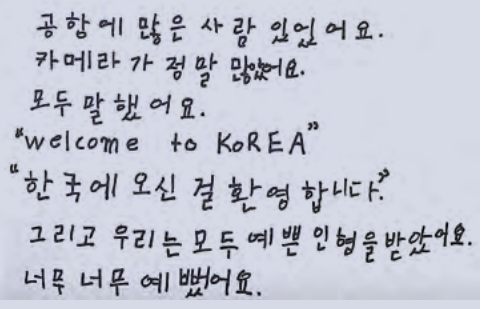


Fig. 1: The largest number of Afghan students were enrolled in Ulsan Seoboo Elementary School. At the end of 2022, Afghan students put together a classroom book called "Shiny Jewelry Box." This is one of the stories included in this book. The text beneath the picture says "There were a lot of people at the airport. There were so many cameras. They all said "Welcome to Korea." And we all got pretty dolls. It was so, so pretty." (Image courtesy of Ulsan Seoboo Elementary School)

In the first five months of 2018, 552 Yemenis, mostly men, claimed asylum on Jeju Island. This was an unforeseen result of a visa-waiver program intended for international tourists who would otherwise have needed visas to enter the Korean mainland.[1] The sudden increased inflow of Yemeni refuges to the island was heavily covered by Korean media outlets, and the so-called "Yemeni refugee issue of 2018" became a wake-up call for Korean society, highlighting the fact that South Korea could receive a large influx of refugees at any time. Four years later, after the fall of Kabul, South Koreans witnessed the influx of another group of refugees into the country, this time from Afghanistan. However, the experiences of these Afghans, as well as the Korean public's reaction to them, differed greatly from the case of the Yemeni refugees.

On August 26, 2021, 391 Afghans who had worked for years at the Korean embassy in Afghanistan, at Korean hospitals, and at vocational training centers run with Korean support arrived in Korea with their families on a flight chartered by the Korean government "in search of lasting peace." Upon arrival, they were granted special status by the Korean government as "special people of merit" rather than "refugees." The news reports and scenes of their evacuation from Afghanistan – which was dubbed "Operation Miracle" – were broadcast in real time by the Korean media, acting as a reminder that South Korea was a responsible member of the international community. In addition, the public discourse on these Afghan "special people of merit" was noticeably different from the perception of refugees that had emerged in the years following the "Yemeni refugee issue of 2018" in that the universal human value of humanitarianism was strongly acknowledged in the case of the Afghan refugees.

Indeed, it can be said that the success and positive perception of "Operation Miracle" was the result of the various resolutions and (sometimes heated) discussions that took place within the religious, academic, media, political, and governmental sectors of Korean society that occurred in the years following the Yemeni refugee issue of 2018. It is of particular interest to note that, rather than being perceived as Muslim refugees, the Afghan refugees were seen as the agents of development and progress following the US invasion of Afghanistan. The term "special people of merit" – as opposed to "refugees" – also played an important role in granting them an identity distinct from the Yemeni refugees.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그리고 우리는 모두 예쁜 인형을 받았어요.
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Although there were many concerns and controversies during the initial immigration and settlement process of the Afghan refugees, their main settlement area in Ulsan is now transforming into a space of hospitality for Muslim immigrants in Korean society. On February 8, 2022, 157 Afghan refugees, about 40% of the total arrivals, settled in Dong-gu, Ulsan. Twenty-nine heads of households were employed at companies cooperating with Hyundai Heavy Industries, and a total of 85 students were integrated into the public education system in Ulsan: 21 children were assigned to kindergartens, and 64 students were assigned to elementary, middle, and high schools. The Ulsan Office of Education's multifaceted approach to Afghan students was crucial during this settlement process. A total of five consultations were held before enrollment began, and in the process, the Ulsan Office of Education applied the motto of "education that does not give up on a single child" to persuade local Korean parents who opposed the enrollment of Afghan children.

It has been said that the issue of Muslim refugees in Korea, which arose with the Yemeni refugees, became internalized within Korean society with the case of Afghan refugees. The settlement process of these Afghan refugees is a seminal example demonstrating how Muslim immigrants were able to smoothly settle within Korean society through the multifaceted hospitality and policy support of the Ulsan Metropolitan Office of Education, the city government of Dong-gu District Office, Hyundai Heavy Industries, and the citizens of Ulsan. It is highly possible that this case of 'hospitality' towards Muslim immigrants in Ulsan may become a precedent for resolving conflicts in a multi-cultural society, which is a reality South Korea is inevitably headed towards. The diverse subjects and directions of hospitality displayed during the Ulsan settlement process for Afghans will undoubtedly remain a key example in South Korea, and indeed, in Northeast Asia more broadly.

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Notes

[1] The visa-waiver program was introduced on May 1, 2002 as a part of a special government act to develop Jeju Island into a 'international cosmopolitan city.'

The Hospitality and Limitations of South Korea for Ukrainian Refugees

Ka Young Ko

On February 24, 2022, contrary to the assumption of the majority of experts, Russian troops crossed the Ukrainian border. Bombings were carried out in large cities throughout Ukraine, including the capital Kiev, Lviv in the west, Kharkiv in the east, and Odessa in the south. Russia called this blunt beginning of the war a 'special military operation.' This was a reference to the operation that was being conducted to protect Russian citizens who were faced with threats in the eastern region. Although the war was expected to be a short one, it has been ongoing for over two years. Whether the cause of the war was NATO's eastward advance, Russia's desire to reorganize the US-centered international order, or the East-West conflict within Ukraine, the bottom line is that it is the people living in Ukraine who suffer from the war, not the rulers of the United States and Russia. One of the consequences of the war is that a large number of Ukrainians have had to seek refuge. According to the UNHCR's data as of March 14, 2024, there are 6,486,000 refugees abroad (5,982,900 in Europe and 503,100 outside of Europe), and the number of displaced people within Ukraine adds to 3,689,000. A small number of these Ukrainian war refugees came to South Korea. They are estimated to be about 1200 to 1500 people.

The characteristics of Ukrainian war refugees who came to South Korea are as follows. Most of the ethnic Koreans *(Koryein)* living in Ukraine have found their way to Korea. Before the Crimea incident in Ukraine in 2014, approximately 30,000 *Koryeins* lived in Ukraine. When the current war broke out in 2022, the number of *Koryeins* living in Ukraine was officially estimated to be about 12,000, though the actual number is believed to be around 20,000. *Koryeins* left the Korean Peninsula in the late 19th century to move to Primorsky Krai in Russia; from Primorsky Krai they moved again to Central Asia, this time due to Stalin's forced migration policy in 1937. It is the *Koryeins* who voluntarily immigrated from Central Asia to Ukraine after Stalin's death who are now returning to the Korean Peninsula as war refugees. However, most of these people did not enter the country as refugees, but rather by receiving a visa for Overseas Koreans (H2, F4).

There was no support from the Korean government for the Ukrainian refugees. Unlike for the 391 Afghan refugees who arrived in Korea on a chartered special flight in August 2021 and were provided with settlement support, the South Korean government did not provide any support for the Ukrainian refugees. However, through private NGO fundraising, airline tickets were sent to *Koryeins* staying in Poland and other nearby countries. Moreover, initial funds for the settlement of Ukrainian refugees who came to Korea were also acquired through private means. A representative NGO that has carried out these activities is *Koryein* Village, based in Gwangju, which is a non-profit incorporated association. Since 2002, *Koryein* Village has been running the *Koryein* Support Center to help *Koryein* migrant workers. It is equipped with a systematic infrastructure to help *Koryeins* find jobs, provide medical support and legal counseling, and operate educational institutions for their children. Using this infrastructure, *Koryein* Village provided 876 Ukrainian *Koryein* refugees with airline tickets for South Korea; after their entry, *Koryein* Village provided initial settlement funds and medical support (including medical treatment surgery) to about 160 people in poor health.

However, as these aid efforts were conducted purely at the private level, the limitations of the situation have become apparent in the past two years. In particular, it has become increasingly difficult for these refugees to acquire Korean nationality or to secure jobs in Gwangju. Because of this, about 40 percent of the refugees are relocating to the larger cities around Seoul or have gone back to Ukraine. The lack of government-level support – contrasting to the situation of the Afghan special people of merit – has inevitably led to difficulties in the settlement procedure.

Lastly, *Koryein* Village activists, who have a good understanding of Korean society's negative views on refugees, do not refer to *Koryein* refugees from the Ukrainian war as "refugees" but rather as "compatriots who escaped the Ukrainian war." Rather than accepting war refugees from the perspective of universal human rights, the approach has been to help these compatriots who have suffered due to the war. This incident reveals some of the limitations of Korean society regarding universal human rights. However, all societies appear to have issues with the notion of *universal* human rights, as was revealed when Europe, which ostracized Syrian refugees, welcomed Ukrainian refugees due to racial and religious affinities. Improving the awareness of refugees and their rights remains a task that South Korean society, and indeed the societies of Northeast Asia, must work towards.

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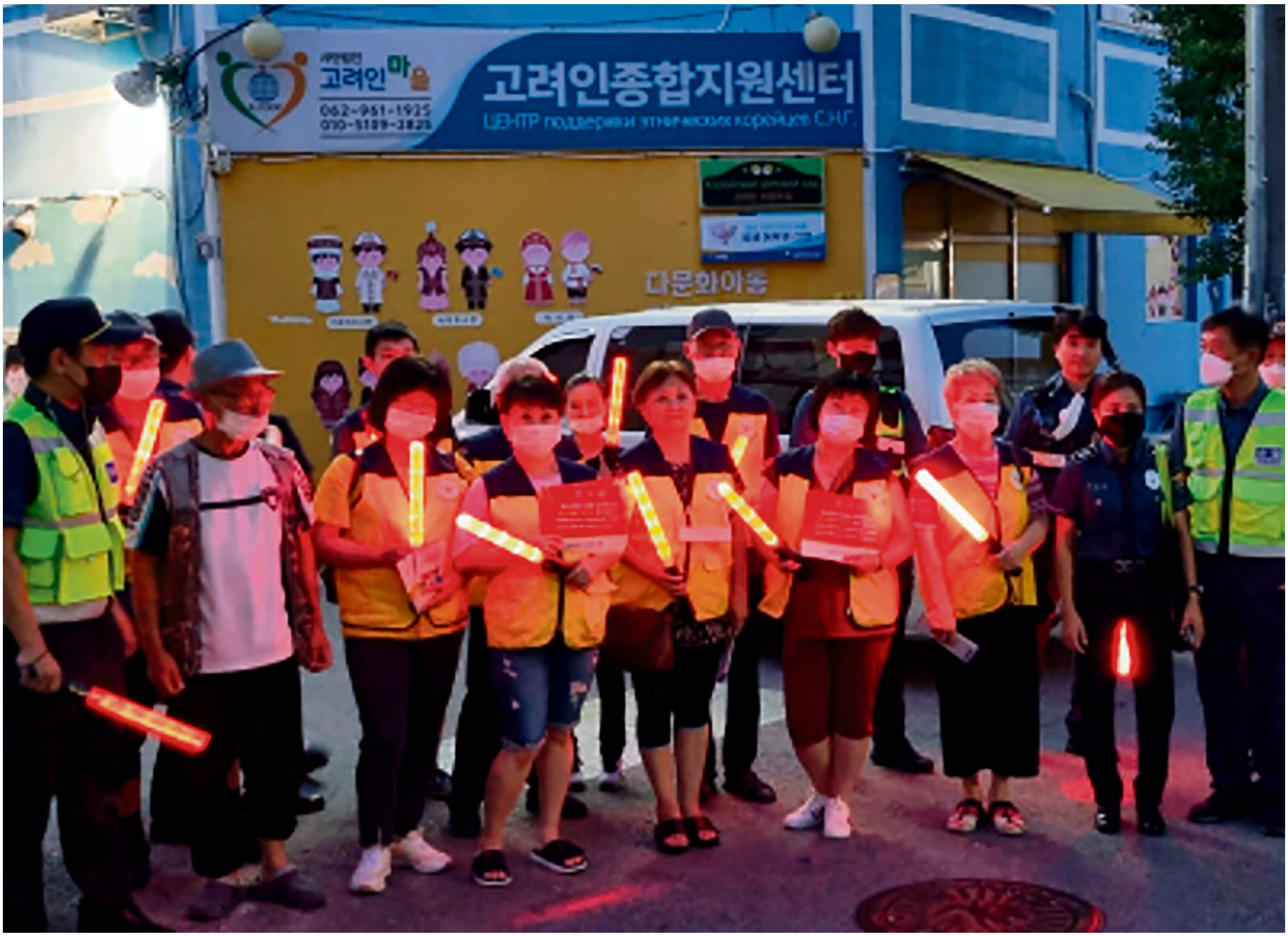
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ЦЕНТР поддержки этнических корейцев СНГ

Fig. 1: Members of the 'autonomous crime prevention unit' run by *Koryein* Village. The blue building in the background is where the headquarters of *Koryein* Village is located; the ground floor houses the "*Koryein* Support Center." Due to their activities, knife crimes in the area are the lowest nationwide among districts with a high concentration of residents from Central Asia. (Photo courtesy of Lee Cheon Young)

Why Don't Russian *Relokants* (War Immigrants) Choose South Korea as their Place of Permanent Residence?

Vadim Slepchenko

Following the start of the war in Ukraine, many Russians began leaving Russia en masse. One of the main reasons for this situation was the desire to avoid military conscription. Essentially, these migrants chose visa-free countries – e.g., Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Mongolia, etc. – as their new place of residence. A significant number of highly qualified personnel that evaded mobilization are IT specialists who were able to work remotely. This migration wave had a positive impact on the economy of the receiving countries. For instance, in Armenia, 4000 Russians have registered as individual entrepreneurs since the beginning of the Ukrainian war. Additionally, among the top 20 IT companies recently established in Armenia, several have ties to Russia. Additionally, Russian *relokants* (war immigrants) have a positive impact on the economy of the host country solely by residing there. They receive a good salary in Russia and spend it in their new place of residence. South Korea also allows visa-free entry for Russian citizens. However, the number of Russians who permanently relocate to Korea is very low. This is due to several factors.

Russians are only permitted to stay in South Korea for a maximum of 60 days at a time, with a total of 90 days allowed within a six-month period. After this period has passed, it can be difficult to re-enter the country through the 'visa run' procedure (temporary exit from the country to a neighboring country and subsequent re-entry). Russians can visit other countries briefly and return to Korea after the visa expires, but the re-stay period is limited to one month. To re-enter the country again, a waiting period of three months is required. Due to these restrictions, it is nearly impossible for Russian citizens to stay in Korea for an extended period without a visa.

Additionally, South Korea has one of the lowest refugee acceptance rates globally, with a recognition rate of only 1.3 percent in 2021, the second-lowest among G20 countries. Furthermore, evading conscription is not a legal basis for refugee recognition in Korea. Therefore, even if Russians who evade enlistment apply for refugee status, the likelihood of being granted asylum is quite low. For instance, three Russians who lived in the terminal of Incheon International Airport in Korea for over a year and applied for refugee status were rejected by the Korean government, as reported by Korean media. All three individuals arrived in Korea in October 2022 and stated upon entry that they wished to remain in Korea due to their reluctance to serve in Russia's military. They attempted to seek refugee status at the airport, but their applications were denied by the Korean Ministry of Justice, which stated that evading military service alone does not qualify them as refugees. According to data from the Korean Immigration Service, a record number of Russians (5750 people) requested political asylum in South Korea in 2023. This is 5.5 times more than in 2022, and more than the total number of Russian asylum applications in Korea from 1994 to 2019. However, it is very likely that only a tiny number of applicants will receive refugee status.

Another deterrent is the electronic authorization system for entry into Korea. K-ETA (Electronic Travel Authorization) is a system designed for citizens of countries who can enter Korea without a visa. In accordance with this, citizens of 112 countries, including Russia, must obtain a special electronic permit before traveling to Korea. The probability of refusal when obtaining this permit is typically very low. However, after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, many Russian men were frequently denied this permit. The K-ETA system has complicated the entry of Russians into Korea. In October 2022, four yachts carrying 23 Russians fleeing military service attempted to enter the ports of Ulleungdo Island and Pohang in Korea. However, Korean authorities only allowed two Russians to enter, denying the rest due to a lack of prior electronic travel authorization. On October 11, two yachts carrying 15 Russians departed from Korean ports. The Russians who sailed from Ulleungdo informed the coast guard that they intended to return to Vladivostok. The other two yachts traveled to Thailand.

Although Russian *relokants* prefer other countries over South Korea due to the above restrictions, the number of those who have made their way to the other countries of Northeast Asia is even lower. This is because although Russia and China share a border, there is no visa-free travel agreement between the two countries (at present). Japan also does not allow visa-free entry for Russian citizens. A reconsideration of its migration policy by the Korean government may help attract high-quality human resources from Russia, including IT specialists, and this in turn may bring about a change of perceptions towards Russian *relokants* in the wider Northeast Asian region.

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홍범도 장군 흉상 제막식
바람이 되어
카자흐스탄에서

Fig. 2: Ceremony for the unveiling of a statue of General Hong Beom-do, a Korean independence fighter who led Korean forces in Manchuria but later sought refuge with his forces in the Soviet Union. He was among the approximately 171,781 ethnic Koreans forcibly relocated to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan by Stalin, many of whom had fought for Korean independence. Due to this legacy, the *Koryein* communities of Central Asia tend to be regarded favorably by the South Korea public as the descendants of independence fighters, and the *Koryein* community in South Korea, in turn, utilizes this cultural capital to great effect. (Photograph by Ka Young Ko, 2023)

Women's Social Agency and Activism in Japan

For *News from Australia and the Pacific,* we ask contributors to reflect on their own research and the broader academic field in Australia and the Pacific of which it is a part. Our contributions aim to give a select overview of Asia-related studies in Australia and beyond, and to highlight exciting intellectual debates on and with Asia. In the current edition, we focus on the theme of "Women's Social Agency and Activism in Japan."

Our authors discuss the possibilities, impacts, and limitations of women's roles and representation in key areas of contemporary Japanese social, political, and cultural life. They specifically focus on female agency and activism in social media (Petrovic), refugee support (Fukuoka and Slater), and political parties and parliament (Levy and Dalton). They demonstrate how the shifting dynamics between the personal and the political, the private and the public, and the local, national, and global can enhance or restrict the empowerment of women in Japan.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
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The Asia Institute

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

Self-Governed Visibility: Japanese Women on TikTok

Sonja Petrovic

The visual language of the Japanese Internet remediates previous practices of photo-taking, selfies, and costume play, while users strive to camouflage certain aspects of their private selves. I suggest the concept of *self-governed visibility* to capture users' practices of navigating between complete visual anonymity and self-promotion, which often includes their effort to consistently post, interact, and garner followers while pivoting and being in disguise. There is no conventional separation of private and public space on TikTok, as users' practices show they can simultaneously conceal and promote or over-share aspects of the self. Thus, they can also create a way for self-exploration beyond the binaries of public and private.

I argue that the shift in visual language on TikTok entails more agency for young users, especially young women, to explore the visual terrain and video formats creatively and autonomously, experimenting with the movable concept of identity. TikTok allows young Japanese women to find new forms of self-expression through anonymity, manipulation, and hyperbolic self-promotion while manoeuvring how their bodies and identities are represented. These self-governing practices present the next step in a well-established Japanese girl culture, as seen in how young women utilise the platform to assert individuality and publicly empower themselves. They do so by crafting their narratives while, at the same time, critiquing and challenging gender stereotypes and norms.

Fig. 1: Japanese young women on the street taking photos. (Photo courtesy of GWMB, 2019, iStockphoto)

Fig. 2: Japanese high school girl on the train. (Photo courtesy of maroke, 2022, iStockphoto)

At the same time, practices aimed at attaining popularity and seeking fame to monetise work require young women to invest time and effort into their online media presence, and to leverage platform features to pick up new viral trends. The labour young women invest in developing their digital DIY careers, which promise creativity, autonomy, and self-expression, is often misrecognised as leisure and exploited by these platforms.[1]

Self-promotion

The defining feature of TikTok is the algorithmically curated For You page, which shapes how content is discovered based on users' previous engagements and activity on the app. Scholars Aparajita Bhandari and Sara Bimo suggest the term *algorithmised self* to explain how the algorithm presents users with access to content that "reflects their interests, likes, and personality, and which might be seen as a curated collection representing their inner 'self.'"[2] Through the personalised For You page algorithm, central to their experience of the platform, users engage with versions of their identities, thus presenting a new idea of the self and modes of sociality on the app.

In addition to the individually customised video feed, For You's algorithm impacts how users' videos achieve virality. Users look for various ways to engage with TikTok's algorithms which can support recognition and fame-seeking, thus opening the possibility of becoming 'TikTok famous.' The most common user practices to ensure visibility are likes, comments, and shares, as well as specific algorithm-related hashtags such as #fyp, #foryou, and viral trends. In this way, users' self-fashioning practices are heavily guided by the algorithm and users' desire to be 'seen' and validated on the platform.

Young women playfully express themselves with the aim of developing a social media following as an influencer, which entails replicable and normative practices on the platform. One of the most prominent hashtags that reflects users' active role in interacting with the algorithm is # おすすめ. This is a shortened version of おすすめのりたい ["I want to be recommended as featured video"] and is aimed at garnering followers and increasing the content's visibility. In most videos, users showcase skills such as singing and dancing. Often, they also request feedback, indicating users' desire for validation by, and dependence on, other users for affirmation and content visibility. The features of duetting (side-by-side response to existing video), stitching viral videos (clipping and integrating scenes from existing video into one's own), creating memes, or joining trending challenges represent forms of engagement on TikTok that can enhance the visibility of a user's content.

One notable example is a 19-year-old person under the pseudonym Kiyomi who uses TikTok to promote her original songs and covers of popular Japanese songs. Interestingly, this user relies on a plain background and expression, despite the abundant effects and filters that the platform offers. She employs various other tactics to attain visibility. In almost all videos, the user engages in 'algorithmic practices,' patterned actions intended to drive up the engagement and help monetise her online performance. The most prominent is using the 'please recommend' hashtag or seeking attribution and acknowledgment from other users on the songs she has made (e.g., "please duet this video" or "please use this song"). This visual language that involves users' time and effort to employ different strategies to become noticed and prominent on the platform, including engaging with the algorithm, can be seen as a new form of self-expression in these short-video format platforms – *an algorithmic fame-seeking self.*

Elevation of the self

AI manga filter is a micro trend on TikTok that shows users transform into manga characters. Unlike other effects on the app that are applied to users' videos to add flair and customise the individual's face, body, or backdrop, the *AI manga* filter generates a cartoon version of the image. It prompts users to experiment with AI to achieve their desired manga portrait. This entails a challenge for users as they compete to produce the most elevated version of the self. Some observed practices include users who play with AI filters to achieve overly emphasised body attributes, such as young women placing toilet paper rolls or bowls on their chests to get large breasts or men holding an egg carton or bread buns to make AI generate abs and a 'masculine' body.

These are shared as hacks for tricking AI into generating an 'idealised' image and creating content that is intentionally meant to be mimicked and replicated. The trend shows that users strive to fit into prescribed formats of self-presentation to achieve visibility on the platform. However, these playful practices can be read as users' emphasis on the societal bias that the AI filter perpetuates by over-sexualising users' bodies, altering their physical features and appearance, and presenting them as conventionally desirable. Young women intentionally mock big breasts through exaggerated displays to reclaim agency and critique compulsory feminine looks and bodies. Similar instances are found among Japanese young women who used *'eropuri'* or erotic photos in *purikura* (photo booths) to denaturalise sexualised presentation through overtly sexual appearance and manipulation of erotic conventions.[3]

Self-concealment

Interestingly, the self-fashioning practices originating from *purikura* culture are also used for self-concealment and obscuring one's identity. In some cases, we see how modification and manipulation of facial and bodily features obscure young women's physical characteristics and identity. In this way, enlarged eyes, blurriness, and brightened faces, combined with other visual features and effects, give users control over aspects of personality they want to present to their audience. 'Self as decoration' serves not only to facilitate self-expression through aesthetics, but also to conceal actual identities and make users unknown to the audience. Fabrication and camouflage of one's private or true self can be seen as a way of enabling young women to participate in the culture of public visibility on their terms, especially considering TikTok's emphasis on visuality.

In Japanese virtual space, anonymising and concealing one's appearance is considered an ordinary and culturally situated practice.[4] Similarly, in TikTok, young women employ different techniques of concealing certain aspects of their identities, using costumes and masks, incorporating cute visual elements, blurring the face or image, avoiding close-ups through certain compositional arrangements, and obscuring one's voice, supported by the centrality of sound effects and lip-syncing on TikTok. Through different strategies to self-disguise and deliberately camouflage their identity, these young women engage in self-fashioning and create an online persona with agency and reality.[5]

However, girls' anonymity practices are not absolute, and they pick and choose the level of anonymity they want to present as part of *self-governed visibility*. This is contingent on users' choices of how much of their 'actual' self they want to share on the app. Japanese TikTok and its visual language entail young women's desire to be seen and validated on the platform, as seen in their intentional self-staging to navigate the platform's algorithmic recommender system and various tactics of boosting visibility. Alongside its potential to support young women's creative self-fashioning practices, TikTok is directing identity practices in ways that are profitable to the platform. Often, these practices are characterised by the quantified, standardised presentation of the self, driven by aspirations for social and economic capital.[6]

Fig. 3: Japanese girl taking a selfie. (Photo courtesy of Satoshi-K, 2018, iStockphoto)

Although TikTok allows young women in Japan to be creative and embrace their self-expression, the app prioritises conventional and normative ideas of the self and lures users to rework aspects of identities to fit within the standardised frameworks of social identities. Additionally, given their vulnerable role in the Japanese digital economy, young women have a special position in the shift to immaterial forms of labour.[7] Their work and practices in the online space should not be reduced to frivolous self-promotion; rather, they represent a career and novel form of labour that often has exploitative aspects. My study finds that the visual language of Japanese TikTok entails the duality of discrete self-presenting under the veil of anonymity and users' desire to attract social currency through replicable and viral trends. All of this is observed as a gendered phenomenon and a continuation of young women's playful use of language via adopting new technology.

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Notes

1 https://www.dukeupress.edu/invisibility-by-design
2 https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/20563051221086241
3 https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781403977120_9
4 https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3535
5 https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3535
6 https://ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/10-3hearn.pdf
7 https://www.dukeupress.edu/invisibility-by-design

Making Refugees Feel at Home in Japan

Christina Fukuoka and David H. Slater

Japan annually allocates large donations to international organisations and Japanese NGOs' overseas activities to support refugees outside its borders, but there are few organisations that focus on supporting refugees already *in* Japan. As the number of refugee applicants grows – and as the number of those not accepted due to restrictive immigration policies grows as well – the bureaucratic procedures increasingly treat people as 'cases' rather than as people to be granted asylum, or until the decision is made, as people to support.[1] This interim support is one of the fundamental requirements of all signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which Japan signed in 1981.

Much of the care of asylum seekers, until their cases are reviewed, is outsourced to the few refugee support groups. It usually takes almost three years just for their first application to be reviewed, and then approximately only 1.7 percent between 2017 and 2022 were accepted.[2] There are many asylum seekers who cannot go back to their home country, and thus they are caught in limbo. Those who work in these support organisations – knowing the poor chance of getting refugee recognition and understanding the lack of support resources available to refugees – are often quite pessimistic, a feeling that is communicated to asylum seekers.

While refugees do not expect much sympathy or care from the immigration officers, more perplexing is the coldness that many report feeling from the non-profit and non-governmental supporters in Tokyo. Even when providing aid, a lot of the supporters and volunteers from this civil society sector personally distance themselves from refugees – the very people they are there to support – by not making any attempts to engage directly with them.

Ibasho: creating a home in the host society

For any refugee fleeing persecution, 'home' is a complex and often contested notion that differs by nationality, age, gender, and personal biography. 'Home' includes material housing but is also related to the immaterial and intangible senses of belonging and identity.[3] It can also encompass 'familiarity,' an in-depth knowledge of the place and people built over time, as well as feelings associated with safety, security, comfort, privacy, and connection.[4] But the characteristics of home are more complicated for those who experience forced migration. What if one cannot find a sense of 'home' – a feeling of familiarity, safety, and connection – in their host lands?[5]

Home is not something that can be taken for granted or assumed. It is an ongoing process, a set of practices with a goal of finding connectedness, belonging, and safety. But in the most fundamental sense, the very definition of refugee means being away from, and temporarily without, a home, seeking refuge in a place that is not home. Even without material stability and geographical fixity, refugees and other displaced people still seek these affective qualities – in Japan, we might say *'anzen'*

Continued overleaf

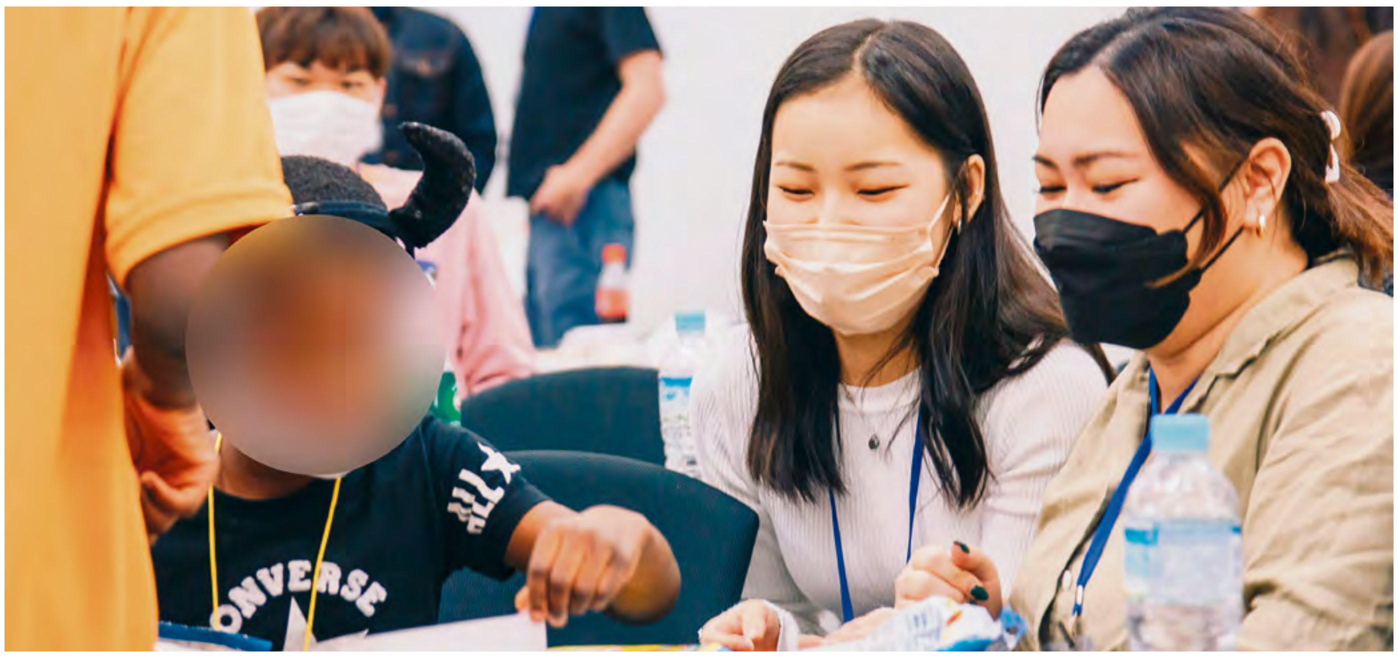

Fig. 1: Playing with children with refugee backgrounds. (Photo by Shota Nagao, 2022)

(安全, physical safety) and *'anshin'* (安心, emotional security). This is exactly what the word *ibasho* (居場所) points to.

Ibasho is a term that became popular through the neoliberal fragmentation of family and work during the 1990s in Japan. It was a way to identify a collection of immaterial and affective needs that were once taken for granted: the personal, social, and economic grounding in a secure (if at times stifling) Japanese post-war society. *Ibasho* is a term that has no exact equivalent in English as it is used colloquially.

Scholars have defined *ibasho* in multiple ways: "a place where one can feel secure and be oneself', 'a place or community where one feels at home"[6] or even "any place, space, and community where one feels comfortable, relaxed, calm, and accepted by surrounding people."[7] It is interrelated to one's well-being, identity, and belonging. Some have pointed out that *ibasho* has three elements: it is a physical or virtual place where one feels comfortable, accepted, and secure, where good relationships are found, and marginalised people can envision a future for themselves in the current society.[8] At best, studies have depicted how *ibasho* can lead to empowerment, serving as a refuge through which the excluded and oppressed can change their society.[9]

Now with the rise of foreign residents and transnational marriages in Japan, the idea of *ibasho* has allowed scholars to recognise and reconceptualise the problems that multicultural students and immigrants face, especially linked to their marginalisation from education and housing in Japan. However, studies on *ibasho* for refugees in Japan – those who seek asylum by crossing international borders – remain scarce.

Fig. 2: Bonding at SRSG's Café. (Photo by Shota Nagao, 2022)

Sophia Refugee Support Group: a home for female refugees

Refugees are in great need of connection, respect, dignity, and belonging in the unfamiliar and foreign environment of their host country. Sophia Refugee Support Group (SRSG), a student-run volunteer group based at Sophia University in Tokyo, seeks to provide this. In SRSG, we realised that what is missing alongside other direct material support, such as food deliveries and Japanese language classes, is a sense of belonging and place. In short, we seek to provide *ibasho*.

With the goal of creating a more welcoming Japanese society regardless of one's race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and gender, SRSG has seven main activities to support refugee-migrants in Japan: awareness raising, food deliveries, hygiene deliveries, Japanese language classes, translations for refugee applications, and immigration detention centre visits.[10] To create a sense of *ibasho* where the socially marginalised feel accepted, safe, and connected, SRSG has also been holding informal social gatherings called 'Refugee Cafés' since its establishment in 2017. These informal get-togethers with 40 to 50 refugees and students are held monthly on Sophia University's campus and have a different theme depending on the month. During these Cafés, people are given the opportunity and the safe space to socialize, share, and create new friendships through food and games: a chance to bridge socially and culturally different realities.

Since its establishment, SRSG has supported nearly 300 refugees across Japan. They usually find us by word-of-mouth, through churches and institutional refugee support organisations. Among this number, most of the refugees in Japan, including those who receive SRSG's support, are male. Nevertheless, SRSG strives to create a space for our female refugee friends through these Cafés, which often become the only place in their lives where they can interact with others. The majority of SRSG's student members are female, so we are able to create intimate gendered bonds across otherwise contrasting life experiences. It was our female members who realised the need for personal hygiene care, including sanitary napkins, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, we began the assembly and delivery of hygiene products to those who could not leave their homes, and we continue sending out these packages today.

Cafés are also a place where the women refugees can more easily talk with refugee men. As other places, including the scattered refugee communities, are often dominated by men, Cafés serve as a place where refugees, both women and men, can openly speak about their experiences with compatriots but also with members of the host society, on an equal footing. Additionally, many student members in SRSG are mixed-race (ハーフ, *hāfu*), have experience crossing borders and returning to Japan (帰国子女, *kikokushijo*), or are exchange students (留学生, *ryūgakusei*). While we are in no way comparing the scope of the challenges of our experiences to that of our refugee friends, the experience of displacement and alienation is not completely unfamiliar to most of us.

During SRSG's Cafés, people are given the time and platform to share and listen to other participants' stories about their homelands–including Japan–and their current situation. An Iranian refugee spoke about the brave young women in her home country who are challenging religious oppression. Another refugee shared updates on the 2021 military coup d'état that continues to affect Myanmar. While to most people in Japan, these are far-away happenings, such events are a reality for our refugee friends and their loved ones. Sharing stories is an opportunity to talk about loved ones and share some of the reasons they have ended up so far away from home.

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Fig. 3 (above): Celebrating a refugee's birthday at SRSG's Café. (Photo by Shota Nagao, 2023)

Iran banzai, Shah
banzai
Viva Iran, Viva Sha

Fig. 4 (right): Female Iranian refugee singing in Persian. (Photo by Shota Nagao, 2022)

Notes

1 https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/publications/press/07_00035.html
2 https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/publications/press/07_00035.html
3 https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0011392120927744
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5 https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/40138
6 https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1324199.pdf
7 https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/napa.12173?casa_token=RnmC_DebpOgAAAAA%3AebzmQZYadgiW-0Rh6vsDlU08jErQ7VBuz2_VNFhQChuN9T7YW0_djh3pGhoBVDELjqLM2d4pkb9Xo9TzFA
8 https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1324199.pdf
9 https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1324199.pdf
10 https://sophia-sdgs.jp/efforts/4315/

The Political, Social, and Economic Empowerment of Tokyo Women

Hiroko Ide Levy and Emma Dalton

Figure 1: People Crossing the Street in Japan. (Photo courtesy of Tony Wu, 2018)

The only prefectural assembly in Japan where women represent more than 30 percent of members is the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly (TMA), which represents the largest metropolis in the world with a population of approximately 14 million. In 2021, the citizens of Tokyo elected 41 female members for the 127-member assembly, making women 32.3 percent of representatives. Tokyo has often outpaced the national government in the pursuit of gender equality. The title of Tokyo's basic ordinance on gender equality uses the term *danjo byōdō sankaku* (*equal* participation of men and women, 男女平等参画). This contrasts with the term used for the national basic law on gender equality: danjo kyōdō *sankaku* (*joint* participation of men and women, 男女共同参画), which is suggestive of a half-hearted approach to gender equality at the national level.

Following female assembly members' calls to address deeply entrenched gender norms, Tokyo's revised plan for the promotion of women's advancement (2022) includes a chapter that promotes changing people's mindsets towards gender equality.[1] The Tokyo government also introduced a 40 percent quota for women for its councils, and it achieved that goal in 2022. Other measures for women's advancement include a support centre for women who are considering returning to work, financial incentives for small and medium-sized companies that contribute to women's advancement, and a website through which women can consult with mentors experienced in combining work, raising children, and caring for family members.

Governor Koike Yuriko, the first female governor of Tokyo and founder of the Tokyoites First Party, is a conservative and tends to mention women's advancement in the context of growth and development. Since becoming the governor of Tokyo in August 2016, she has focussed on addressing the problem of childcare shortages and has had some success: the number of children on childcare waiting lists in Tokyo dropped from 8586 in 2017 to 300 in 2022. Still, there are concerns about the quality of childcare, with staff shortages and limited facilities such as playgrounds.[2] Discussions in the TMA also suggest that having a female governor made it easier to raise women's issues such as economically vulnerable women who have difficulty purchasing menstrual products.

Ongoing gender inequality

We have been investigating issues raised by female members at the TMA to see if female representatives of different political parties pursue different types of women's issues. We analysed statements made at plenary and committee meetings by female politicians from three political parties that had relatively high numbers of women at the TMA between 2017 and 2021. The 2017 TMA election resulted in 36 female members being elected to the assembly (28.3 percent of the total).

Our analysis of the statements found that most were concerned with women's work-related issues such as work hours and carer's leave, but that women from different political parties focussed on issues ranging from pregnancy and health to violence against women. Whereas women of the Tokyoites First Party *(Tomin Fāsuto no Kai)*, who secured 18 TMA seats after the 2017 election, had a tendency to support career-oriented women through their pregnancy and child-rearing, women of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), who gained 13 seats at the 2017 election, tended to support vulnerable women by addressing issues of violence against women. These two different groups of women (career-oriented women and women in vulnerable circumstances) often coincide with higher and lower socio-economic statuses, respectively.

Regardless of political party affiliation, many TMA female assembly members raised gender inequality issues related to work and called for measures to address them. Compared with men, far fewer women are working in managerial positions,[3] and many more women are non-regular workers.[4] Both of these disparities result in lower wages for women overall.[5] In Japan, people are often employed in the managerial career track (*sōgō shoku*, 総合職) or the clerical track (*ippan shoku*, 一般職) and most of those in the clerical track are women.

This two-track system emerged around the time when Japan signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and legislated the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1985.[6] Instead of eliminating discrimination against women, however, a separate career track was created in an attempt to avoid accusations from the international community related to gender discrimination in Japan. What supports this practice is a gender norm that men should work long hours at their paid work while women take care of family at home, unpaid.

A 2019 government survey showed that younger people tend to express their opposition to the idea that "husbands should work outside the home and wives should protect the home," but this deeply entrenched gender norm still negatively affects married women who work outside the home.[7] Married women themselves, as well as people around them, often expect wives to take care of family even when they work full time. In addition to raising children, Japanese women are often expected to take on the work of caring for parents and/or parents-in-law.

At the TMA, it was also pointed out that women who have left work to raise children tend to start considering working outside the home again when the youngest child starts primary school. However, they tend to face a mismatch between their skills and needs on the one hand and available jobs on the other. There are not many jobs where they can utilise their skills and experience (now many women leave work in their 30s) but have working hours that allow them to continue their caring work as well. Assembly members called for measures such as promoting job-sharing and supporting companies that re-hire women who have left work earlier.

Even if not as slow as women's political empowerment, the pace of women's economic empowerment has been far from ideal in Japan. Recent governments have introduced workplace reforms related to reduced work hours and equal pay for equal work. They have also revamped parental leave policy (only 17 percent of men are taking parental leave). While governments have accelerated efforts towards gender equality after the Council for Gender Equality (*Danjo Kyōdō Sankaku Shingikai*, 男女共同参画審議会) was established in 1994, these efforts have not always been motivated by genuine concern for women's welfare.

Osawa Mari, who was a member of the Council when it submitted a report called 'A Vision of Gender Equality: Creation of New Values for the Twenty-first Century' to the government in 1996, identified two approaches to gender equality coexisting within the report: (1) gender equality as an objective, and (2) gender equality as a means to an end.[8] The former approach addressed "the deeply ingrained prejudice against women" that had hindered the effect of existing measures such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Law. This approach is often promoted by feminists and the progressive side of politics. The latter approach regarded women's participation in the labour force as necessary to tackle urgent issues such as an aging population, which resonated with discourse within business and the conservative side of politics.

Making Tokyo a better place for working women

While recent statements by female TMA members reveal many serious issues for working women in Japan, Tokyo is one of the prefectures that is leading the country in relation to promoting women's advancement. An example of this is that the Tokyo government's executive positions are held by a higher proportion of women compared with other prefectures.

At the same time, an emerging buzzword suggests that women's advancement is creating another type of gap in society: similar to 'power couple' in English, *'pawā kappuru'* (パワーカップル) means a married couple with each earning a high income. In the book that is said to be the origin of the buzzword, economists Tachibanaki Toshiaki and Sakoda Sayaka highlight that the disparity between higher- and lower-income households is growing as women with higher levels of education and high-income husbands are increasingly entering the workforce in Japan.[9] Meanwhile, many unmarried men over 40 years old say they are not financially stable.[10] While gender equality and women's advancement have a long way to go and surely remain an important political agenda for some time to come, this new development invites us to acknowledge that women's advancement could lead to economic inequalities between high-income couples on the one hand and low-income singles and couples on the other hand.

Furthermore, cross-party alliances between women are not common, and women from different parties do not necessarily have the same policy goals. Koike Yuriko's TFP pursues 'gender equality' of the neoliberal variety, characterised by the idea that women become economic replicas of men; the Komeito is often more concerned with women's health and maternal policies; and the JCP tends to use a human rights framework to seek better conditions for women.

Work-related issues prevail when women TMA members talk about gender-equality issues, regardless of affiliation. This is likely to do with the fact that Tokyo has a very large population of young professionals, and thus the TMA's gender equality claims converge around the idea of making Tokyo a better place for working women.

With a critical mass of women on the Assembly,[11] a female governor, and a climate where women Assembly members feel comfortable raising women-related policy issues,[12] the TMA has the potential to be a relatively progressive workplace for women, including its elected representatives. Moreover, it has the potential to create women-friendly policies for the citizens of Tokyo. Improvement in working conditions for women in politics and elsewhere nonetheless requires 'critical actors' to make effective changes – numbers alone are not enough.

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Notes

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[2] https://www.tokyo-np.co.jp/article/192374
[3] https://www.dw.com/en/japan-why-are-there-so-few-women-in-top-managerial-roles/a-61777351
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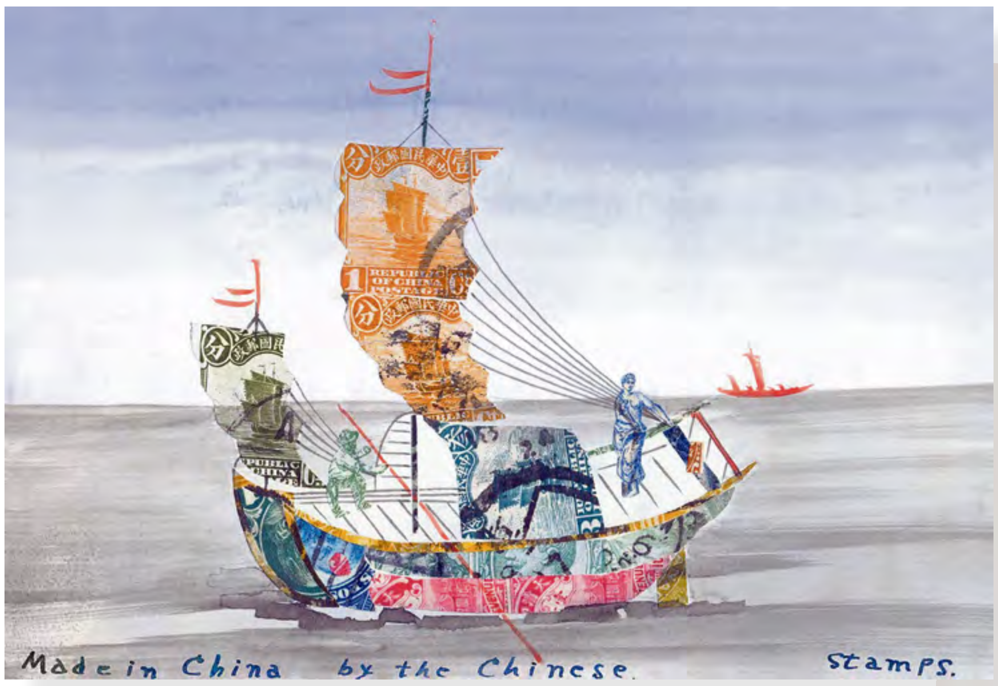

Made in China by the Chinese Stamps.

Fig. 1 (right): *[Chinese Boat] Made in China by the Chinese Stamps.* Stamp Collage Postcard, c. 1925. Undivided back, 13.9 x 8.9 cm, Author's Collection.

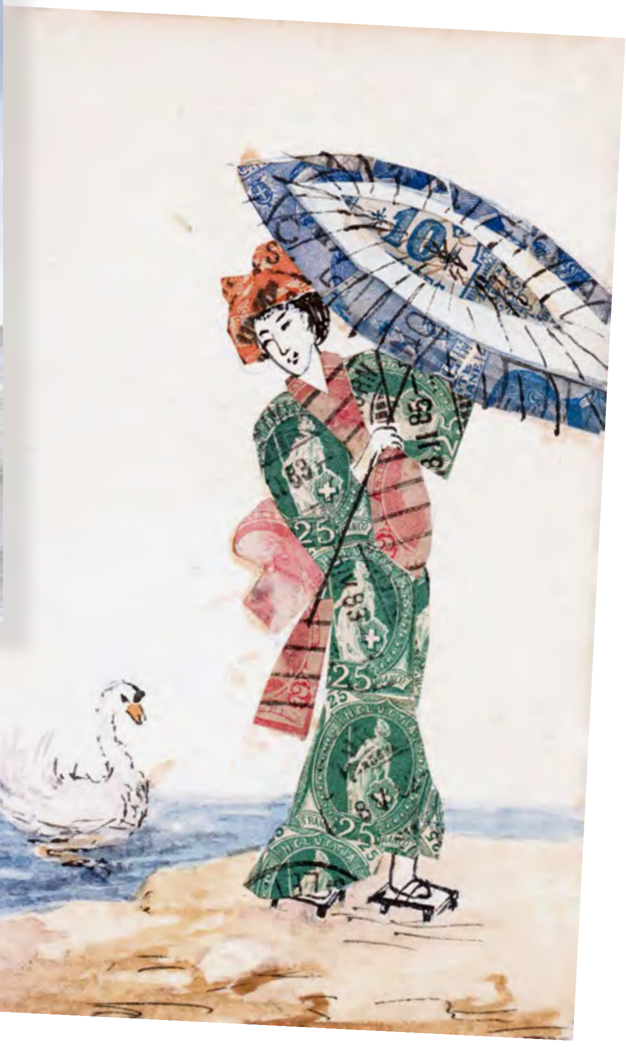


Fig. 2 (far right): *[Japanese Woman].* XY [Signed], Stamp Collage Postcard, c. 1925. Divided back, 13.9 x 9 cm, Author's Collection.

Fig. 3 (below): *[Chief Sitting Bull?]*, Leather Hand tinted Postcard, Postally used August 26, 1906. Undivided back, 13.1 x 7.7 cm, Author's Collection.

The Handmade Postcard in China and Native America

Omar Khan

In early modern China and Native America, labor was cheap enough and artistic talent was ample enough to spawn unique traditions of handmade postcards between 1900 and 1940. "Handmade" because each was made by dexterous human fingers, not reproduced on printing presses as the typical postcard was during the so-called Golden Age (1898-1914) of this new medium. Each card is a one-off. Handmade cards rode a wave of imperial innovation and negotiation along the borderlines between cultures. They were enmeshed in economic entanglements between peoples, benefitting from and subverting unequal relationships. They served as gestures for and against modernity, just as mass pictorial reproduction was beginning to define human social and psychological spaces. They are odd and rich anomalies.

The picture postcard industry started in the early 1890s as an inexpensive way to exchange visual "Greetings from" messages. Transportation networks built on ships and trains moved things and people around quicker than ever before. *Billions* of picture postcards were being mailed around the world by 1900, thanks to new postal regulations like the Universal Postal Treaty of 1893. Printing technologies – primarily the lithographic, collotype, and halftone presses, roughly in that order between 1895 and 1910 – enabled ever cheaper mass production. Postcards were truly the Instagram of their time: interactive social objects, much like the digital posts of today. Handmade postcards – a barely acknowledged type and a fraction of the total – stand out for their distinctive ability to flow against the grain. In this essay, I try to use a few of the many such postcards assembled over the past decades in my collection to discuss similar themes and approaches in such cards across continents.

China: "Pictures made from the clip and paste of multiple stamps"

The Chinese handmade stamp postcard tradition has no real equivalent, though postcards made by hand from cut-up stamps were minor occurrences in Europe and America. In the words of one collector, these postcards are "the ultimate in postcard design... Many of them were handmade by Chinese artists, a stark difference to the vast majority of postcards made by the West. Expensive to produce then, these postcards are highly sought after today and yield highest prices in the collectors' market."[1]

Gao Lengxiang – the secretary to Cao Kun 曹锟, (1862-1938), the military leader and fifth President of the Republic of China in 1923-1924 – is said to have been the first to use stamps to make collage postcards. The variety of cards suggests the product could also have been invented in fits and starts, by firms who saw the opportunity in reusing cancelled stamps. Gao Lengxiang may simply have been the first prominent person to be associated with the practice, perhaps fascinated by the creative opportunities afforded by "these mechanically reproduced miniature documents or receipts."[2] Most stamps on these cards are from 1910-1920. In my own collection, the earliest firmly datable postcard is from 1923.[3]

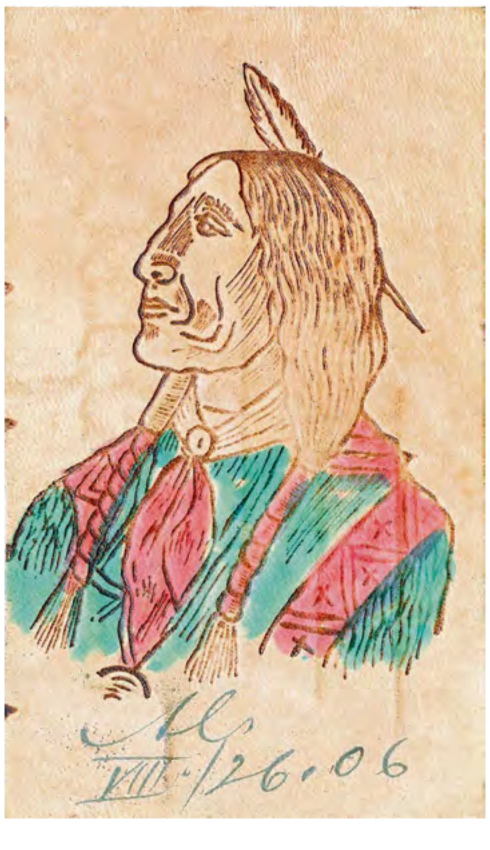
The typical Chinese stamp collage postcard[4] is the ship shown in *Made in China by the Chinese Stamps* [Fig. 1]. The background is hand-painted watercolor. The primary foreground object or set of objects on these cards are assembled from used stamps, selected for color and printed imagery to form a ship's mast. This consists of the stamps of an iconic Chinese ship from the most common first set of stamps printed by the new Republic of China in 1913. The lines of a postal cancellation are dramatically extended with ink to tie the two sails to the figures of a woman and man pulling at them. The woman is Eirene, the Greek goddess of peace, cut from a single French stamp popular since the 1870s.

Most of these cards followed set general templates. Other boat examples have hills in the background and grass in the foreground, while keeping the focus on a single boat with a mast of similar stamps. A cottage industry was likely involved in their production, with backgrounds painted by one person, stamps cut by another, placed in piles of color by size and type by a third, and so on. Efficiencies in manufacturing would have been key, even if the cards were meant to say what this one does loudly at the bottom: "Made in China by the Chinese."

The French word *"collage"* means glue, the invisible ingredient that makes the whole thing work. Glue recipes were part of vendors' competitive arsenal; remarkably, only few stamps have peeled off or discolored a century later. Stamps are exemplary collage: bits of paper glued on paper. Makers could effortlessly mix the medium with painting and line work, as in details like the oar and flags in Figure 1. The mixture could also be more subtle, as in one postcard, *Chinese Girl*, where a major part of its surface is watercolor, but the designs which catch the eye are tiny strips of stamps. Their cleverness and beauty supports accounts that have Chinese artists making money with this work, despite the period after 1900 presenting very trying times for Chinese artists and painters.

Stamp collage postcards were dependent on the growing number of stamps harvested from international mail coursing through the world in the first quarter of the 20th century. Most Chinese postcards, like those of other countries around the world, were printed in Europe, especially Germany.[5] This might have given some advantage to the handmade postcard publisher. No capital nor credit was needed to start ordering them from abroad, nor photograph to print from – all ingredients, especially the stamps as fodder from around the world, could be sourced locally.

Most handmade postcards have no message or electrotype other than "Union Postale Universelle Post Card" on the back. A few, like those of "Chao-chow Drawn Work Co., Shanghai" and "Swatow Drawn Work Co., Hong Kong," are branded. Swatow seems to have been the most common brand; the firm is described in a commercial directory as "Manufacturers & Exporters of Swatow Drawn Thread Work, Embroidered Silk Shawls, Hand-made Laces . . . Wholesale & Retail." Although managed entirely by Chinese, Swatow Drawn Work was started by missionaries in China in the 1890s as a "philanthropical venture, to assist widows and wives of men not earning sufficient to gain a livelihood."[6] For Swatow, postcards were probably a secondary product line



among many that depended on fine motor skills for execution.[7]

Indeed, there is a long tradition of paper cutting known as *"jianzhi"* (剪纸),a popular folk art from rural China that dates to the advent of paper almost 2000 years ago. In rural areas, the craft was practiced by women to make red objects like lanterns and other patterns for festive occasions. While a direct connection between these two forms cannot be assumed, paper cutting was foundational to the stamp collage postcard.

Women were a popular subject of handmade postcards. Beautiful Chinese women dominated the lithographic calendars that flooded the domestic market around 1910-1920, often in Western dress and daring to be visible in a new world.[8] Many of the women on these cards are apparently Japanese, meant to appeal to Japanese tourists, of whom there were many in China even before the invasions of the 1930s. Western customers might hardly have known the difference between Chinese and Japanese women. A geisha seems to be shown in one example [Fig. 2], where Swiss stamps of a Greek goddess make up the bulk of the geisha's body. One of the few cards apparently signed by a maker, "XY," it supports the supposition that artists could be engaged by this practice.

Some postcards of women show them on display in quiet landscapes, but they are more likely to be playing tennis, riding animals, spinning cotton, pulled in human rickshaws, swinging under a tree – *doing something*. This contrasts with the posed images of Chinese courtesans frozen in studios on early 20th-century photographs and printed postcards. Stamped women figures were more in line with women posing with bicycles – the socially and politically active women who "embodied the dynamism and ambivalence of the early Republican movement," in the words of Joan Judge.[9]

Did the Chinese handmade postcard have any precedents besides the tradition of paper cutting? In the book *The Eight Brokens*, Nancy Berliner discusses 19th-century painted collage traditions in China, based on paper tickets, rubbings from bronze vessels, poetry, or eight (a symbol of good luck) different kinds of paper fragments displayed together on a large surface.[10] "Bapo" drew attention to broken nature of the items, also known as *jinhuidui*, 锦灰堆,or "a pile of brocade ashes." The form privileged "the superiority of the damaged,"[11] said to represent the "decay of Chinese civilization." In the case of handmade postcards, the "broken" stamps are put back together into a living figure, also playing on the tension between destruction and reconstruction.[12] There was at least a conceptual relationship between the two forms.

Handmade postcard were not only made for the foreigner. They tread dual spaces and easily appealed to Chinese buyers and collectors, as they do today. Very few have English titles inked in, though they also do not typically have the distinct epigraphy like signature red artist seals expected by Chinese audiences on paper goods. They fit more than one cultural palette. I like to think these cards were also an eloquent response to Western symbols of officialdom and authority, turned into scraps and recomposed in the service of traditional Chinese art and identity, as if saying "we can do something better with this in our own way."

Native America: Extending traditional leather crafts

While a handmade – in this case hand *painted* – postcard tradition also developed in early 20th-century British India, it is by turning to an even more distant tradition in Native America that we can tease out some of the common features in the response to modernity that handmade cards invoke. There may seem to be no more far-fetched comparison to be made than between China and Native America. One is among the largest and oldest civilizational areas on earth, then home to hundreds of millions of people, versus tribes scattered across the vast North American continent, reduced to about 250,000 by the 1890s – about half the population of Shanghai in 1900 – through genocide and ethnic cleansing. The story of these tribes, their resistance and adaptation to settler colonists, is very different from the colonial experience in China or India. Or is it? White Americans visited "reservations," not port cities, in their "own" country and named other people by their skin color. This was a deeply uneasy relationship, too, with "natives as symbols both of [American] national unity and threats to that nationalism."[13]

The handmade Native American postcards consisted of leather and were popular in the United States between 1903 and 1909, when they were banned by the postal service because they gummed up sorting machines.[14] Leather had a long tradition of usage among native tribes. Mostly made of deer skin, lines were incised with the heated tip of a metal tool through "pyrography," or "writing with fire." Iron stamp tools could also be used to create an image, so they were not always entirely incised by hand. But even then, they conveyed the sign – or visual promise – of having being made by hand through the distinctive tool dashes around the card frame, as seen on the untitled 1906 portrait of (most likely) Chief Sitting Bull [Fig. 3]. Cards were often colored in, most often with common red and green dyes. The association of leather and Native Americans was deep and even extended to "moccasin postcards," or soft baby shoes tied together with a paper tag on which a stamp, address, and message were written, all no bigger than a regular postcard.

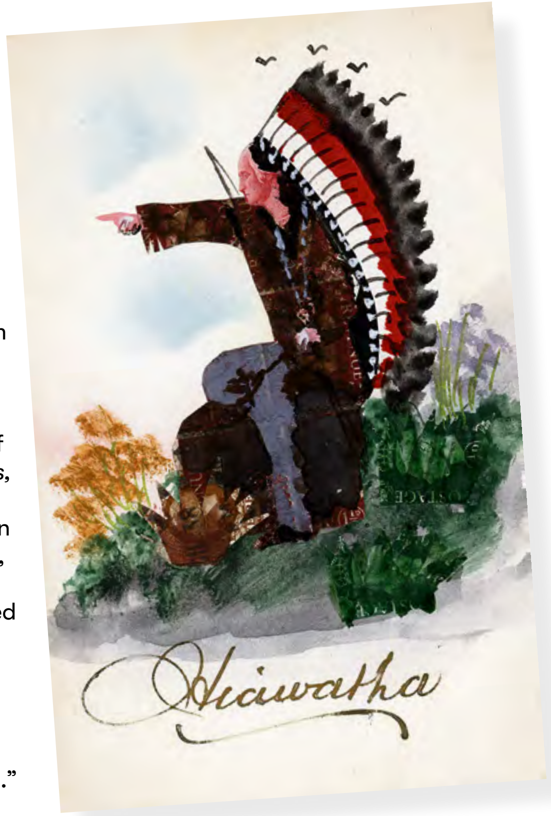


Fig. 4 (below): *Hiawatha*. Stamp Collage and Painted Postcard, c. 1925. Undivided back, 13.9 x 8.8 cm, Author's Collection.

More than any other kind of handmade postcard, the leather postcard asks to be touched. Like the stamped collage card, it references its own materiality and the native hands that presumably made it. For foreign buyers, they also marked a visit to *another* place. This visit could be slightly uncomfortable, if not scary, as in a popular type entitled *I'm Being Well Entertained*, showing a white man tied to a pole with a Native American pacing around him with a tomahawk. The native was (still) dangerous. Going to a reservation where these cards were bought represented a heroically playful act for the tourist. An undertow of violence even appears in self-reflective cards like *The Indian with His Pipe of Peace …* , featuring a native and settler's faces with the Kiplingesque ditty: *"The Indian with his Pipe of Peace Pipe/Has Slowly Passed Away/But the Irishman with/ His Piece of Pipe/Has Come Prepared/To Stay."*

Of course, as with Indian and Chinese cards, things were not entirely one-sided. Some handmade postcards celebrated Hiawatha, the Mohawk co-founder of the Iroquois Confederacy in the mid-1100's CE. Hiawatha himself might be a composite of many Native myths, even adapted by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in a popular 1855 poem, *Song of Hiawatha*, which also resonated among settlers seeking connection to an ancient past that they were trying to possess. As Laura Goldblatt and Richard Handler put it, "representations of the US nation-state were caught between two often contradictory impulses: the need to disassociate the national culture of the United States from Europe in order to highlight the uniqueness of the American experiment, on the one hand, and the hegemonic preference for racial Anglo-Saxonism as well."[15] A woman called Minnehaha is the lover Longfellow ascribed to Hiawatha, whose wife and daughters were killed in the struggles to unify tribes. Minnehaha was often shown together with him on handmade postcards.

The story of Pocahontas – the daughter of the Pamunkey Indian chief who had united some thirty tribes in the Virginia region – was alluded to on other handmade cards. She was said to have helped saved one of the first European colonists, who later married her for love. She apparently converted to Christianity and later died on her first visit to Europe in 1617. As the paradigmatic settler story of Indigenous acceptance of European arrival, the story of Pocahontas is full of inconsistencies: she was actually captured and held by the English for a year as ransom for prisoners held by her father, for example. Similarly, whether Minnehaha was Hiawatha's relative, sister, or lover is unclear.

Conclusion: Modifying modernity

Handmade postcards mediated between the past and present, and between truths and the fabrication of myths, as they straddled the cultural frameworks between peoples. Perhaps more than printed postcards, in both China and Native America, they allowed for a measure of local agency in the manual dexterity and symbolism they referenced, which could be interpreted by people to their own ideological measure.

The slipperiness and hybrid nature of the handmade postcard is illustrated on one of my favorite such cards, *Hiawatha* [Fig. 4]. Pointing toward a future of unity, if not westward as the colonists rode, is the profile face of George Washington, the ubiquitous "Sun Yat Sen" of America's first stamps. Other stamps used within this and another postcard of the same figure are from Germany and England, so it might have been made in America by Chinese artisans inspired by cards from home; or it could have been made by Native American artisans inspired by Chinese cards; or they could also have been made in Europe. The artisan(s) have painted over the stamps, fading select bits through the brushstrokes, an effect rare on collage cards. The card's ambiguity is breathtaking; even as it celebrates a Native American hero in Chinese stamp format, it celebrates the hand of craftspeople and the sophistication of their perceptions of distant and local empires.

Handmade postcards convey the tangibility of place and people, in leather or with cut stamps and watercolors. The hand added a layer of authenticity to the visual, tiny disruptions on the march to mass reproduction. Not derivatives, but intimate innovations.

Cultural borders and fault lines are deep and shallow at the same time. Deep because *how* Chinese and Native American artisans and publishers construed their representations was a function of long traditions, expertise, materials at hand, and the skills to work them. They relayed interactions that both invoked stereotypes and allowed something of the irreducibility of the individual to come through. The artisan burning the heads of chieftains on leather, or the woman's fingers cutting and collaging tiny fragments of paper together, re-asserted the traditional within the modern visual experience.

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Notes

[1] Thomas Brandt, *China in Those Days – Insights into Historical China through Postcards of the Time*, Bad Oldesloe, Germany, goasia Verlag, 2008, p. 27.

[2] Goldblatt Laura and Handler Richard, "Toward a New National Iconography Native Americans on United States Postage Stamps, 1863-1922" in: *Wintherthur Portfolio A Journal of American Material Culture*, Vol. 51, No. 1, Spring 2017, Chicago, University of Chicago Press Journals, 2017, p. 55.

[3] December 13, 1923 sent by one Gert. Bell. I also have a card from "Sept 17'" which might mean September 1917. On January 1, 1923, the international postage of postcards sent from China was fixed at 6 cents, and blank cards were issued by the General Post Office.

[4] These cards are also misleadingly known in the English-speaking world as "macerated stamp" postcards. "Macerated" mislabels the postcards – the stamps are not boiled into pulp but simply clipped or cut. I prefer returning these cards to the collage family of objects where they belong. Thanks also to Dr. Antje Richter for pointing out deficiencies in using the term "macerated" (Personal Communication, April 18, 2023).

[5] Howard Woody, "International Postcards Their History, Production and Distribution (Circa 895-1915)" in Geary Christaraud M and Webb Virgina-Lee, *Delivering Views Distant Cultures in Early Postcards*, Washington DC, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998.

[6] *Daily Consular and Trade Reports*, Washington, D.C., Dept. of Commerce and Labor, Friday Sept. 17, 1909, p. 8, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Daily_Consular_and_Trade_Reports/DU9BAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=%22Swatow+Drawn+Work%22&pg=PA12-IA54&printsec=frontcover, acessed April 6, 2023.

[7] *The Comacrib Directory of China 1925*, Hongkong, Commercial and Credit Information Bureau, 1925, Vol. I, p. 141. https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Comacrib_Directory_of_China/Usg4AQAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=%22Swatow+Drawn+Work+Co.%22&pg=RA5-PA141&printsec=frontcover, acessed April 6, 2023.

[8] Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2004, p. 37 and for between 1910 and 1920s in particular, p. 93.

[9] Judge Joan, "Portaits of Republican Ladies: Materiality and Representation in Early Twentieth Century Chinese Photographs," in: *Visualizing China*, pp. 131-132.

[10] See Nancy Berliner, *The Eight Brokens Chinese Bapo Painting, Boston*, Museum of Fine Arts, 2018, p.11.

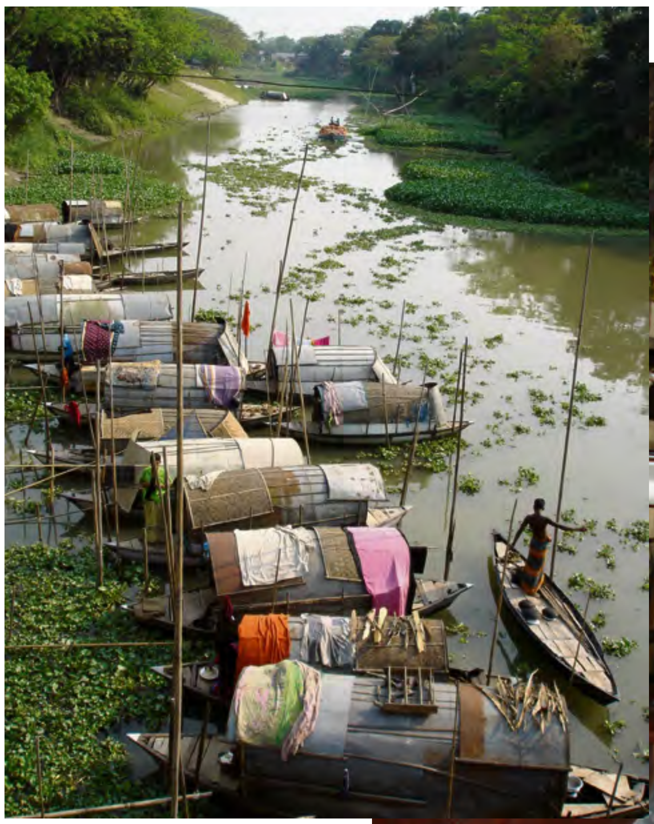
[11] Ibid., p. 80.

[12] Of course, the handmade postcard tradition would also have mixed and wider origins. True collage, the combining of paper objects and scraps was a long-standing practice in Europe and America as well. It grew enormously in popularity during the 19th century when printed paper ephemera became ubiquitous and were incorporated into albums by growing Western middle classes eager to collect and preserve the world floating before them. These kinds of albums and practices would have made their way with Europeans to China as well.

[13] Goldblatt and Handler, 2017, p. 56.

[14] Wilpon Bonny, "A Look at Leather Postcards," in: *Postcard History*, August 27, 2020, p.2, seen 5/12/2023 https://postcardhistory.net/2020/08/a-look-at-leather-postcards/. According to Wilpon, they were still sent in envelopes after the ban, and later were permitted again and can still be bought in American tourist shops.

[15] Goldblatt and Handler, p. 57.



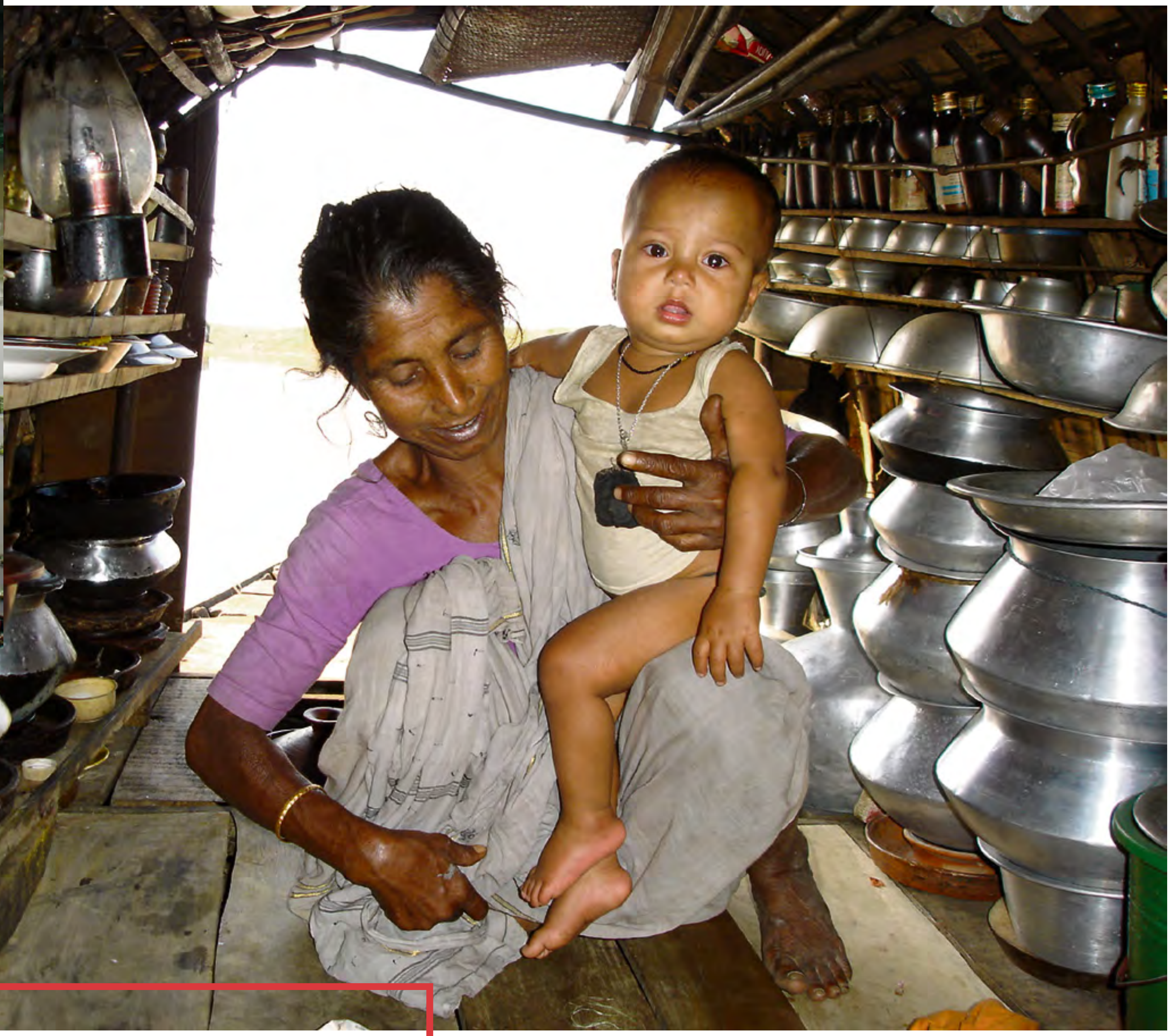


Fig. 1 (above left): A fleet of ‘Bede’ boats in Bangladesh. (Photo by the author, 2007)

Fig. 2 (above right): A ‘Bede’ boat from inside. (Photo by the author, 2006)

Between Freedom and Poverty

The ‘River Gypsies’ of Bengal

Carmen Brandt

In Bengal, today the Indian union state West Bengal and Bangladesh, the so-called ‘Bedes’ are perceived to lead an itinerant way of life and hold ‘exotic’ occupations. This reputation has attracted the attention of Bengal’s sedentary population and stimulated the imaginations of many authors and poets who often portray the ‘Bedes’ in a highly romantic manner. In English, ‘Bedes’ are commonly referred to as ‘Gypsies’ or ‘River Gypsies.’ Similar to the European ‘Gypsies,’ their women often attract more attention than their men. This article will focus on the reasons for this circumstance and will deconstruct such erroneous but widespread portrayals.

The Bengali term *bede* and its various variants (e.g., *bādiẏā*, *bediẏā*, and *bāidyā*) are in themselves highly problematic; for this reason, I write ‘Bede’ in single quotation marks when I refer to the people who are designated thus by others. This term is the pivot of the representation and categorisation of itinerant groups in Bengal, and it is comparable to the problematic term “gypsy”: both terms refer to various groups that are often perceived by outsiders as one community, even though these groups reject relationships with each other. Even with the help of etymological analysis, it is impossible to determine clearly for whom the term *bede* was first used, and what it originally meant. However, Middle Bengali sources indicate that the oldest variant of the term, *bādiẏā*, was primarily used to refer to snake catchers and charmers.[1] This meaning largely coincides with its common usage in West Bengal, but it contrasts with the prevailing usage in contemporary Bangladesh, where *bede* is often equated with “river gypsy.”

The categorisation of ‘Bedes’

According to the meaning of the English term, the so-called ‘River Gypsies’ of Bangladesh are characterised by living in groups and travelling around on boats [Figs. 1-2]. They earn their living through a wide variety of occupations: catching or charming snakes; performing acts with animals or as acrobats; selling remedies, household utensils, cosmetics, and jewellery; or treating rheumatism and toothache. However, these groups have their own names, often in accordance with their occupations (e.g., *lāuẏā*, *māl*, *sāndār*, *sāpuṛe*), vehemently reject the designation ‘Bede’ for themselves, and generally do not maintain any kinship relations with other ‘Bede’ groups. Rather, they are different endogamous groups that are perceived as one community only because of their ‘exotic’ commonality: moving around on boats.

The idea that different occupational groups supposedly form the ‘Bede’ community was already noted in publications by British colonial officials.[2] Influenced by the idea that the ‘Gypsies’ of Europe originated in India, these colonial officials often drew comparisons with local populations who held similar socio-economic roles, subsumed them under one term, and constructed them as one community. To this day, however, local and foreign scholars cannot agree on what kind of community the ‘Bedes’ are supposed to form, which is already evident from the contradictory terms used to categorise them: caste, community, class, ethnic group, race, and tribe. In West Bengal, the ‘Bedes’ are officially listed as a Scheduled Tribe, although they were officially a Scheduled Caste until 1976. In Bangladesh, meanwhile, they have not yet been officially classified at all. There are several reasons for this contradiction, the most important of which is the uncritical adoption of the colonial categorisation of the local population in independent India.

However, during British colonial times, also Bengali scholars contributed to this classification and, above all, to negative stereotypes of the ‘Bedes.’ For instance, in his article “On the Gypsies of Bengal,” Rajendralal Mitra (1822–1891) wrote: “In lying, thieving, and knavery he is not a whit inferior to his brother of Europe, and he practises everything that enables him to pass an easy idle life, without submitting to any law of civilised government, or the amenities of social life.”[3]

This kind of harsh judgement is no longer voiced either by foreign or Bengali scholars. Yet, old and recent ‘exotic’ depictions of ‘Bedes’ in literary works by Bengali authors have been contributing their share of negative stereotypes on the ‘Bedes’ until today. Moreover, these portrayals suggest that the categorisation of different itinerant groups as one community was actually not invented by British colonial officials, but merely consolidated by them.

The portrayals of ‘Bedes’ in literary works

So-called ‘Bedes’ are often at the centre of novels, short stories, plays, and poems by well-known Bengali authors, including Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Al Mahmud, Balaichand Mukhopadhyay (Banaphul), Shamsur Rahman, and Jasim Uddin. Similar to the portrayal of non-sedentary groups and individuals in European literature, their mobile lifestyle is often depicted in a highly romantic manner full of freedom, as in the introductory song of a 'Bede' in Jasim Uddin's (1903–1976) theatre play *Beder Meẏe* ("The Daughter of a/the Bede", 1951) [Box 1].[4] Moreover, also in these Bengali literary works the stereotyping of the itinerant woman is particularly striking: she is the focus of almost all works, consciously or unconsciously turning men's heads, and is accordingly portrayed as a *femme fatale.*

This is, for instance, the case for Radhika, the female protagonist in the 1943 short story *Bedenī* ("The Bede Woman") by Tarashankar (1898–1971): "As if there is intoxicating power spread on every part of the slender, slim, long-limbed body of the Bedenī like a black snake; in her thick, curly black hair, in the parting like a white thread in the middle of her hair, in her slightly curved nose, in her two wide half-shut, curved eyes with an intoxicating gaze, in her pointed chin – there is intoxicating power in her whole body. As if she has arisen after bathing in an ocean of wine, the intoxicating power drips down, flowing along her whole body. As the scent of the mahuya flower fills her breath with intoxicating power, so the black figure of the Bede woman is intoxicating to the eyes. Not only of Radhika, this is a generic characteristic of the appearance of all the girls of this Bede community."[5]

The disproportionately frequent depiction of the non-sedentary woman compared to her male counterpart reflects the actual important role of 'Bede' women in income generation, during which they often have to deal confidently with male customers. The description of the 'Bede' women Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) watched from his houseboat in Shahjadpur (in present-day Bangladesh) in 1891 sheds light on the impression 'Bede' women might have left and still leave on these male outsiders: "The girls, too, look good – willowy slim and tall, compact, an unrestrained style of the body much like English girls. That means a quite open demeanour; they have an easy, simple, and fast mode in their movements – they do seem to me exactly like black daughters of the English."[6]

In Tagore's case, it is the posture of the body and movements of the 'Bede' women that seem to be most impressive, apart from their slim and tall appearance. In another passage, he further describes how a 'Bede' woman aggressively argues with a policeman. 'Bede' women are physically active because of their occupations, which often require them to walk from village to village and on the streets of cities [Fig. 3]. Most importantly, they often come into contact with unknown men, and do so with self-confidence. Considering all of this, they indeed must have left an impression on men in particular, who would have been fascinated by their athletic figures and seemingly bold attitudes, in contrast to the general genteel womenfolk in Bengal of that time, especially among the urban higher strata from which the authors overwhelmingly originate.

Consequently, it is not surprising that sedentary men such as the authors of literary works were fascinated and inspired by these 'other' women. However, besides erotically charged portraits of 'Bede' women and the romanticisation of a non-sedentary life full of freedom, the reader is often also confronted with the hard everyday life of the 'Bedes.' The portrayal of the life of the 'Bedes' on the margins of society corresponds to the reality of many so-called 'Bede' groups. The socio-economic status of many such groups is comparable to that of so-called 'untouchables,' today often referred to as Dalits, which is why they have increasingly attracted the attention of development organisations since the 1990s.

The 'Bedes' as a target group of development organisations

Parallel to studies by scholars,[7] reports by development organisations[8] also uncritically cite sources from the colonial period and even push the idea that the various 'Bede' groups form one community – e.g., by referring to them as an ethnic group and speculating about their potential origin outside of Bengal. Whether this happens intentionally cannot be answered definitively. However, an ethnic minority in a country like Bangladesh – where some 98 percent of the population are Bengalis and around one-fourth live below the poverty line – is a more attractive target group for international donors than a 'merely' socially marginalised group of Bengalis. Furthermore, it also fits international narratives of endangered ethnic groups. An exoticisation and ethnicisation of the 'Bedes,' and the associated supposed threat of imminent cultural loss, have therefore dominated media coverage of the 'Bedes' in Bangladesh in recent years. This trend is in stark contrast to the efforts of the various non-sedentary groups themselves, who self-identify not only as Bengalis but also as Muslims.

The socio-cultural adaptation of 'Bedes'

Contrary to the impression given by development agencies and the media that the 'Bedes' fear losing their supposedly 'other' culture centred on a by outsiders romanticised free life on the boat, my interviews with 'Bedes' revealed that they do not perceive their lifestyle as another culture. On the contrary, they are aware that their socio-economic role as itinerant traders and service providers is on a steady decline. For this reason, more and more 'Bede' groups are becoming permanently sedentary. The main reason lies in the fact that by the end of the 19th century the demand for their products and services was already decreasing, partly due to the expansion of infrastructure and new forms of entertainment. Accordingly, they often face harsh poverty today, and some even beg on the streets, including those of Dhaka. After settling down, 'Bedes' take up other occupations and also try to adapt socio-culturally to the majority population. This concerns, for example, the role of women: while non-sedentary 'Bede' women play an active role in income generation and also offer services and/or goods to men, 'Bede' groups that have become permanently sedentary increasingly practice gender segregation and forbid their women from working outside the home. This strategy of socio-cultural adaptation goes hand in hand with narratives of origin in which 'Bede' groups claim an Arab ancestry to secure social recognition within Bangladesh's Muslim majority society.

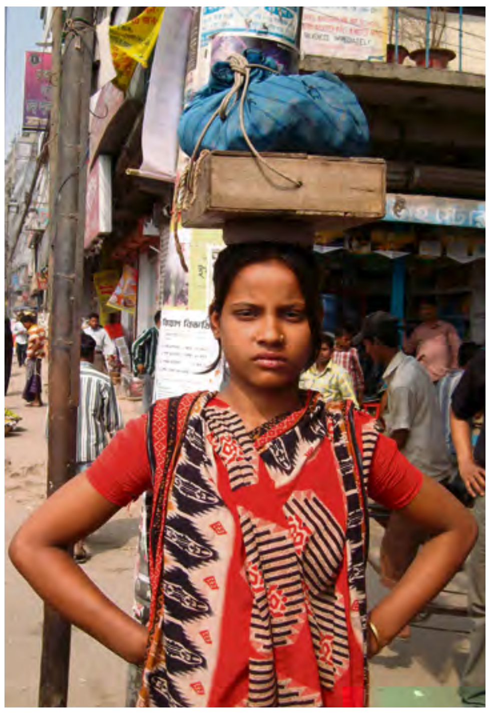


Fig. 3: A 'Bede' girl with snakes on her head in search of customers on the streets of Dhaka. (Photo by the author, 2008)

Interestingly, one essential element of these narratives of origin is the supposed relationship between the terms *bede* and "Bedouin," established through folk etymology.[9] On the one hand, this establishes a credible connection to the Arab Bedouins for many people in Bangladesh, but on the other hand, it forces so-called 'Bedes' to accept the designation "Bede" for themselves, which they previously rejected vehemently. The 'Bedes' who proudly explained this erroneous folk etymology to me still continue to reject that designation. This obvious contradiction illustrates that many 'Bede' groups have recently been struggling with their identity, their place in Bangladesh's society, and a consistent self-representation. Thus, the 'Bedes' are another example of contemporary Bangladesh being in search of its identity between Bengaliness and Islam: although the 'Bedes' I interviewed emphasise their Bengali identity, at the same time they are motivated to seek an origin in Arabia to achieve a better status within the majority society.[10]

Outlook

Though the socio-economic status of so-called 'Bedes' in West Bengal is hardly any better than that of their counterparts in Bangladesh, they are less likely to face identity conflicts in a state that is much more heterogeneous both ethnically and religiously. Status as a member of one of the numerous Scheduled Castes and Tribes in India mainly promises direct socio-economic advantages, which is why some 'Bedes' in West Bengal have no problem with registering as members of a Scheduled Tribe. At the same time, the further reinforcement of the category "Bede" – i.e., the ethnicisation of the 'Bedes' in Bangladesh – automatically means socio-cultural marginalisation. This might attract more funds from development actors in the short term, but as a non-Bengali ethnic group in Bangladesh, the land of the Bengalis, the 'Bedes' would be second-class citizens in the longer run. The above-mentioned adaptation strategies adopted by various 'Bede' groups make it clear that this is precisely what they want to prevent. It therefore remains to be seen how national and transnational institutions will respond – that is, whether they will continue categorising the various non-sedentary groups, which in many cases are already sedentary, as one community, or whether they will allow these groups to become part of the majority society.

ও বাবু! সেলাম বারে বার,	*o bābu! selām bāre bār,*	Oh Sir! Greetings again and again,
আমার নাম গয়া বাইদ্যা বাবু!	*āmār nām gaẏā bāidyā bābu!*	My name is Gaẏā Bāidyā, Sir!
বাড়ি পদ্মা পার।	*bāṛi padmā pār.*	[Our] home is the bank of the Padma [river].
মোরা পঙ্খী মারি পঙ্খী ধরি মোরা	*morā paṅkhī māri paṅkhī dhari morā*	We kill birds, we catch birds,
পঙ্খী বেইচা খাই,	*paṅkhī beicā khāi,*	By selling birds we eat,
মোদের সুখের সীমা নাই,	*moder sukher sīmā nāi,*	Our good fortune has no boundaries,
সাপের মাথার মণি কেড়ে মোরা	*sāper māthār maṇi keṛe morā*	We seize the jewel on the head of the snake
করি যে কারবার।	*kari ye kār'bār.*	And trade with [this poison].
মোরা এক ঘাটেতে রান্দি বাড়ি	*morā ek ghāṭete rāndi bāṛi*	We cook at one wharf
মোরা আরেক ঘাটে খাই,	*morā ārek ghāṭe khāi,*	We eat at another wharf,
মোদের ঘরবাড়ি নাই,	*moder ghar'bāṛi nāi;*	We have no permanent home;
সব দুনিয়া বাড়ি মোদের	*sab duniẏā bāṛi moder*	The whole world is our home,
সকল মানুষ ভাই ;	*sakal mānuṣ bhāi;*	All people are [our] brothers;
মোরা সেই ভায়েরে তালাস করি আজি	*morā sei bhāẏere tālās kari āji*	Searching for those brothers today
ফিরি দ্বারে দ্বার।	*phiri dbāre dbār.*	We roam from door to door.

Box 1: Introductory song of a 'Bede' in Jasim Uddin's (1903–1976) theatre play *Beder Meẏe* ("The Daughter of a/the Bede," 1951).

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Notes

1 Cf. e.g. Śarīph, Āh'mad (ed.) 1976. *Saoẏāl sāhitya.* 1st ed. Ḍhākā: Bāṃlā Ekāḍemī, p. 27.

2 Cf. e.g. Wise, James 1883. *Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal.* London: Harrison and Sons, pp. 212–221.

3 Mitra, Rájendrala'la 1870. "On the Gypsies of Bengal", in: *Memoirs Read Before the Anthropological Society of London. 1867-8-9, Vol. III.* London: Longmans, Green, & Co., p. 126.

4 Ud·dīn, Jasīm 1993 [1951]. *Beder meẏe.* 5th ed. Ḍhākā: Palāś Prakāśanī, p. 12. This and all other extracts from Bengali literary works were translated from the Bengali original by the author of this article.

5 Bandyopādhyāẏ, Tārāśaṅkar 1994 (Beng. era 1400). "Bedenī", in: *Tārāśaṅkar-racanābalī: Caturtha khaṇḍa.* 5th ed. Kal'kātā: Mitra o Ghoṣ Pāb'liśārs, p. 357.

6 Ṭhākur, Rabīndranāth. 1997 (Beng. era 1404). *Chinnapatra.* Repr Kalikātā: Biśbabhāratī Granthan'bibhāg, p. 56.

7 Cf. e.g. Rahman, Md. Habibur 1990. *The Shandar-Beday Community of Bangladesh: A Study of Social Change of a Quasi-Nomadic People.* Dhaka: Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis).

8 For an example from a Bangladeshi development organisation, see: Maksud, A.K.M.; Rasul, Imtiaj 2007. *The Nomadic Bede Community and Their Mobile School Program.* [...]. Dhaka: Grambangla Unnayan Committee, p. 2

9 For an extensive discussion on this folk etymology and various narratives and theories of origin, see Brandt, Carmen 2018. *The 'Bedes' of Bengal: Establishing an Ethnic Group through Portrayals.* (Transdisciplinary South Asian Studies 1.) Zürich: LIT Verlag.

10 The phenomenon of claiming an Arab, Persian, or Central Asian ancestry is well known among Muslims in South Asia who thus argue that they are not descendants of low-caste converts but have a rather noble origin, cf. e.g.: Brandt, Carmen 2021. "The Universal Urge for Upward Mobility and Local Challenges: Ashrafisation among 'Bedes' in Bangladesh", in: Vu, Trang Dai; Pye, Oliver; Ölschleger, Hans Dieter; Distelrath, Günther (eds.): *Humanistische Anthropologie: Ethnologische Begegnungen in einer globalisierten Welt. Festschrift für Christoph Antweiler zu seinem fünfundsechzigsten Geburtstag von seinen Freund*innen und Kolleg*innen.* (Bonner Asienstudien 20.) Berlin: EB-Verlag: pp. 473–502.

"Who Wants To Go See France?"

The Vietnamese Experience at the Paris Colonial Exposition 1931

LE Ha Thu Oanh, Alicia

The Paris Colonial Exposition opened its doors on May 6, 1931 in the Vincennes Forest on the outskirts of Paris and ran for six months until November 15. Nicknamed "Lyauteyville" after Marshall Lyautey, its general commissioner, the Exposition was a gigantic, magnificent complex of pavilions representing French overseas colonies from Asia to West Africa. The colonies of other powers such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and the United States – although not the British Empire – were also exhibited. The event was intended to rekindle the general population's dwindling interest in, or even hostility towards, the French Empire's colonial project, which had suffered gravely from the 1929 economic crisis. It was estimated that the Exposition attracted between seven and nine million visitors from around the world.[1]

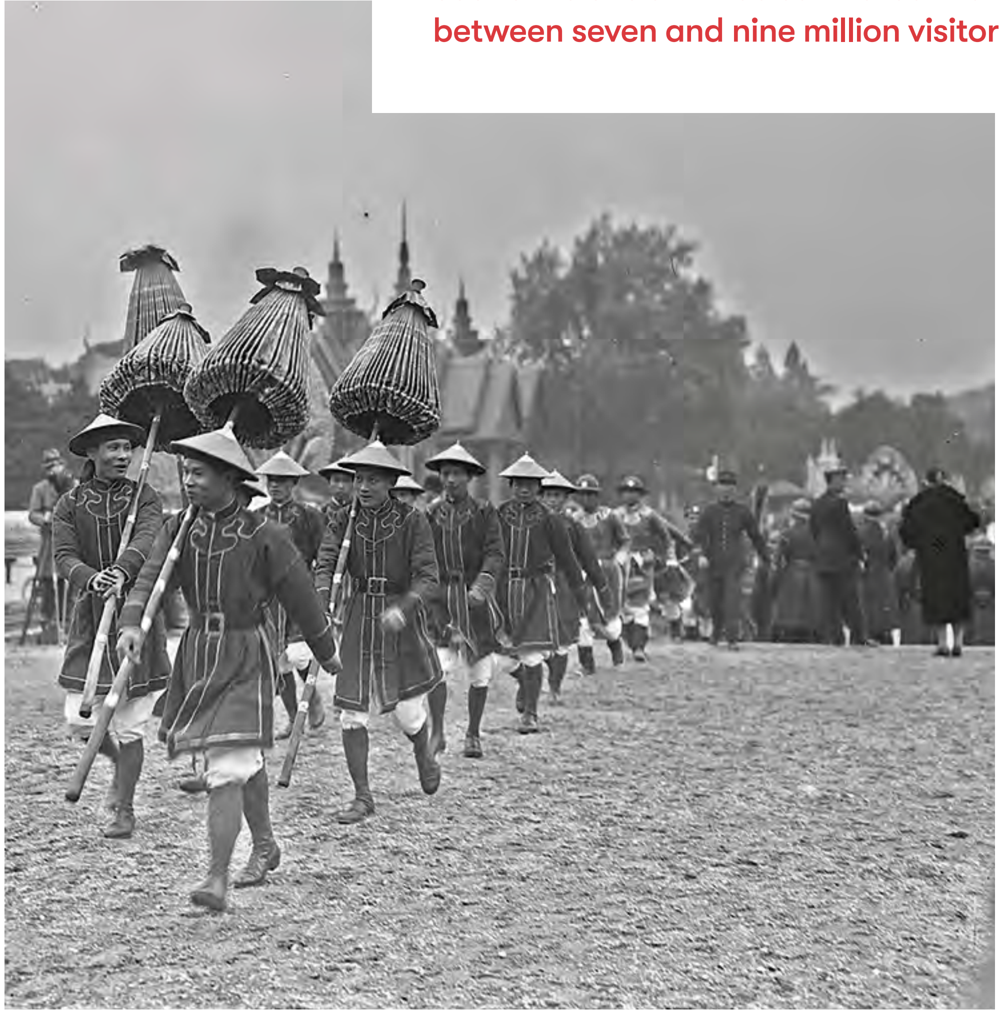
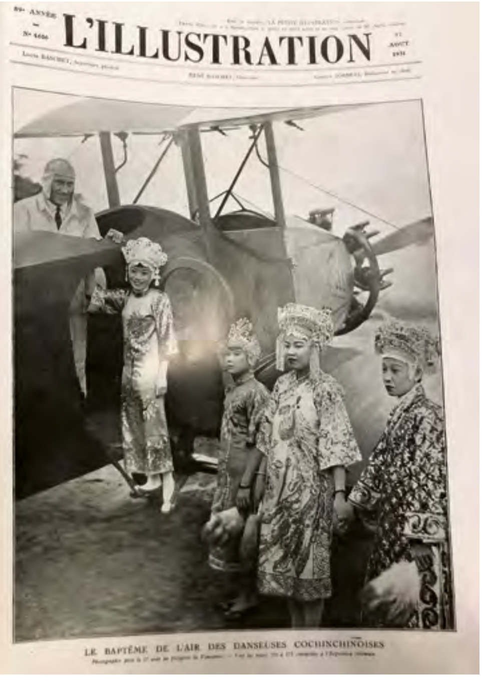


Fig. 1 (above left): 21/5/31, Parade at the inauguration of the Annam pavilion at the Colonial Exposition. (Photograph by Agence Rol. Photographic Agency. Source: National Library of France, Department of Prints and photography, EI-13 [1761], public domain.)



L'ILLUSTRATION

LE BAPTÊME DE L'AIR DES DANSEUSES COCHINCHINOISES

Fig. 2 (above right): The first taste of air travel for dancers from Cochinchina at the Colonial Exposition. (Source: *L'Illustration*, 22nd August 1931. Photograph by the author.)

The Colonial Exposition in the pages of Vietnamese-language press

As early as 1927, a number of Vietnamese-language newspapers across the three Vietnamese regions of Tonkin (northern Vietnam), Annam (central Vietnam), and Cochinchina (southern Vietnam) in the Indochinese Union (1887-1954) had started running news reports of "the grandest-ever colonial exposition" in Paris.[2] From 1929 to the end of the Exposition, more than a dozen newspapers and periodicals had run over 100 news items on the Exposition. Most frequently reported were announcements from the colonial government to recruit local artisans and industrialists to bring their trade and workers to the Indochinese pavilions, where they were expected to display, make, and sell a wide range of goods. Such goods included everything from ivory, bronze, and silk embroidery to pictures and children's toys – products that were "simple yet rich in Vietnamese spirit."[3] News of Governor-General Pierre Pasquier's travels and communications with Paris were closely followed as positive signs for Indochina's participation at the Exposition, as well as for the French government's support for fiscal projects in the colony.[4] During the preparation period, names of native colonial secretaries were chosen to represent each of the five Indochinese regions at their corresponding pavilion and ethnographic zone, and well-wishing messages were posted to congratulate Vietnamese businessowners and intellectuals selected to participate in the Exposition with a hope that they would enrich Vietnamese creative productions upon their return.[5]

Celebrity performers and sportsmen – who were elected by the colonial government to represent Vietnamese culture and civilisation – were also showered with attention from the press, most notably *Gánh hát* Phước Cương (Reformed Opera Troupe) and their star performer, singer-actress Năm Phi. The troupe frequently ran rehearsal shows to raise funds for their travel to Paris, and they would later travel to Hanoi to re-perform their Exposition show in early 1932. While in Paris, Miss Năm Phi was lauded by the French press as a "talented actress with captivating gestures" that could "rival even the best French singers and actresses."[6] In a famous photograph on *L'Illustration* in August 1931, the Phước Cương troupe were shown getting their first taste of air travel at the open field at Vincennes [Fig. 2]. Miss Năm Phi was photographed half-holding onto the plane door, half-dangling above the ground with a playful smile towards the camera, while her fellow performers line up in front of the plane in full performance garb, with a white pilot looking on from inside the plane. The native costume proved to be a popular look for the stars: in a congratulatory advertisement column, the tennis champion Nguyễn Văn Chim, one-half of the star tennis duo with Huỳnh Văn Giao, was also photographed wearing a traditional Vietnamese outfit and a traditional male turban, which he paired with a pair of leather shoes.[7] The Vietnamese press were elated, as it was the first time that native sportsmen were chosen to compete with their counterparts in France. The reading public hoped that these dashing young men, having won titles in Singapore and Colombo, Sri Lanka, would gain even more triumph and eventually proceed to the Wimbledon championship.[8] Sadly, the duo were defeated in the first round of the French Championships at Roland-Garros soon after their arrival in Paris.[9]

Who wants to go see France?

Travelling to France to observe and participate in the Exposition spectacles was a recurring theme in the pages of the Vietnamese press, reflecting the rising socio-economic power and demands of the burgeoning Vietnamese middle and elite classes. In a fundraising event for Chim and Giao, their manager Triệu-văn-Yên invited Jacques Lê-văn-Đức, a seasoned bicultural traveller, to share his experience of travelling in France for interested inquirers.[10] Another savvy businessowner, Khánh Ký, owner of a photo studio in Saigon, also seized the occasion and bought recurring advertisements between March and April 1931 to offer tours with discounted transportation and accommodation for Vietnamese guests who would like to travel and enjoy the festivities. After the Exposition ended, the studio ran an attractive deal for customers who would like to have their photographs, presumably from the Paris voyage, printed on their beautiful paper stock imported on this special occasion.[11] The colonial government, in a more official tone, announced that it would provide guidance and support for members of the native mandarinate, elite and middle classes to travel to the Exposition; however, the government would not provide any financial assistance.[12] These accounts suggest that among the millions of attendees into the Exposition, a very small number might have been Indochinese elites.

On the one hand, the occasion became a tool for native Vietnamese elites to demonstrate their growing significance and engagement within Indochinese social, economic, and political life. In travelling to consume the extravaganza of the Exposition, they effectively identified themselves closer with the colonial gaze that regarded their compatriots, culture, and history through an Orientalising, othering lens. In the Exposition's displays, young Vietnamese men and women were adorned in "traditional," "native" costumes and situated near apparatuses of colonial modernity and adventure, creating an uncanny sight of cultural synthesis. It was an idealised image of a land with a rich cultural history and demure, beautiful, and mysterious subjects. These subjects, thanks to technological advancement and the success of the French *mission civilisatrice*, had now been packaged and delivered straight to the audience at Vincennes. In this idyllic *mise-en-scène*, the displayed people had been elevated from their position as lowly "silent native *figurants*" or performative extras.[13] They were transformed into the centre of attention at the Exposition, encapsulating the colonial order that the colonial government had been determined to project towards the French public. It stood in stark contrast to, and even helped to downplay and distract from, the bloody repression of the Yên Bái uprising at the hand of the colonial government in Indochina only a year prior.

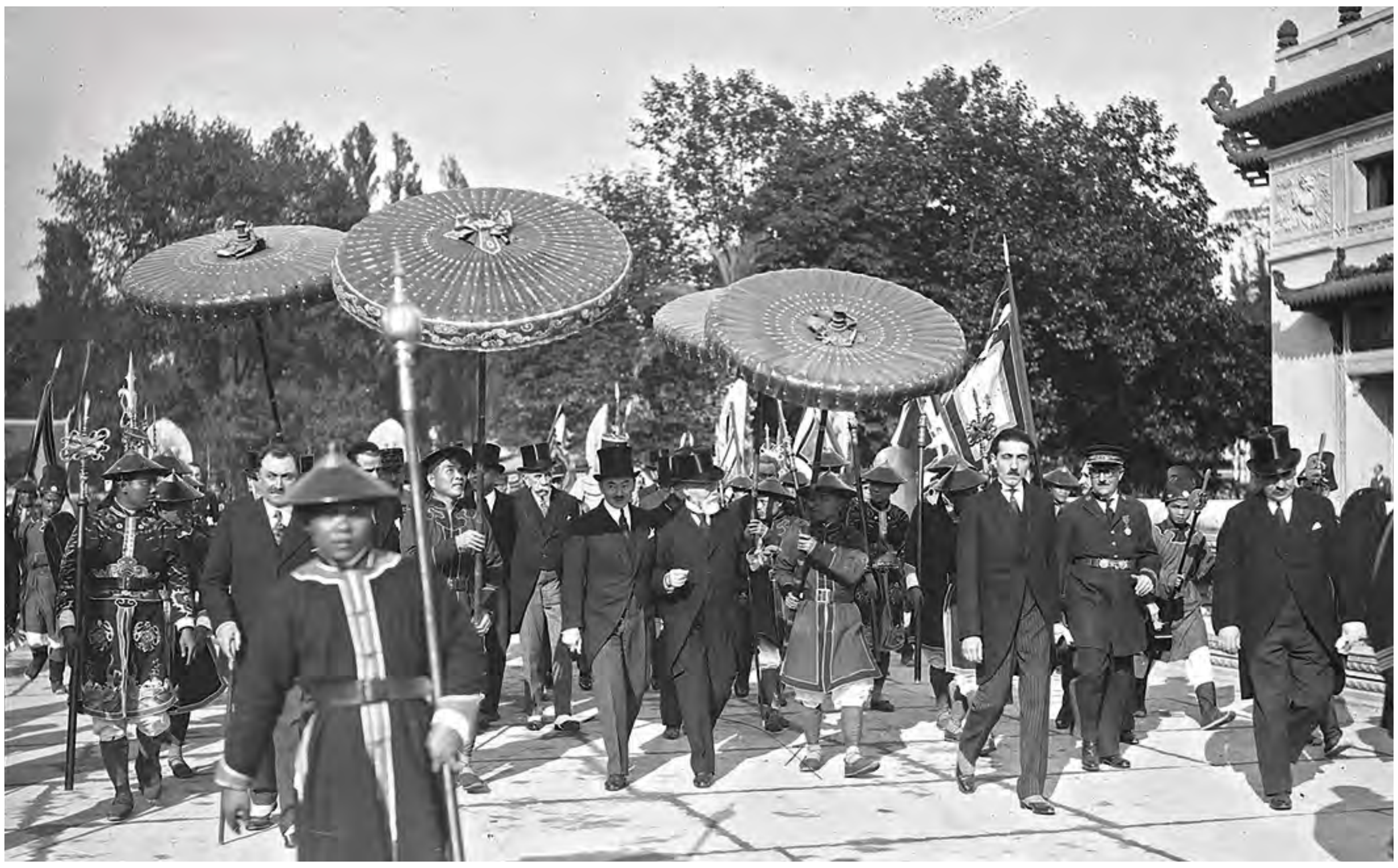


Fig. 3: 22/7/31, President of the French Third Republic, Paul Doumer, visited the Indochinese pavilion at the Colonial Exposition. Doumer was Governor-General of French Indochina from 1897 to 1902. (Photograph by Agence Rol. Photographic Agency. Source: National Library of France, Department of Prints and photography, EI-13 [1777], public domain.)

Rethinking Franco-Vietnamese collaboration

On the other hand, the Vietnamese experience of the Exposition reflected the ongoing demands of the native elite for more representation and agency in the *“Pháp-Việt Đuề Huề”* (*“collaboration franco-annamite,”* Franco-Vietnamese collaboration) era, which started under the reign of Albert Sarraut, twice Governor-General of Indochina (mandates: 1911-1913, 1917-1919). This era was intended to win over native support for the colonial regime with promises of liberal reform under French guidance. In this project of collaborative colonialism, Vietnamese-language press – written by predominantly male intellectuals educated in colonial schools and even returning from France, played a crucial role. While delivering news about the Exposition, members of the press also took on the responsibility of using this occasion to leverage for reforms in governance policies that would be more beneficial to the natives, if only to the elite and middle classes.

For instance, one opinion piece on December 19, 1931 addressed the issue of French politicians' urge for political reform in Indochina, most particularly Vietnam, following the success of the Colonial Exposition. The article – published in *Hà Thành ngọ báo* – listed the chronology and characteristics of each colonial policy, from the decade-long “collaboration” policy to the “protectorate” policy that was expected to be picked up by Emperor Bảo Đại upon his ascension to the Vietnamese throne in 1932. Finally, it disagreed with the proposal for an “assimilationist” policy raised by veteran colonial military official, who hoped that the effectiveness of forced acculturation would be replicated in Indochina as it had in Africa. The piece wholeheartedly cited the words of Albert Sarraut himself regarding French rule in Indochina on the occasion of the Exposition: “… our protection method is not intended to frighten people, but a combination of characteristics between the white and yellow races. The day when the yellow race comes to recognise that France can really outdo everyone else on this globe and even ourselves, that is the day they will finally understand us, not as a teacher, since we do not want that, but understand us as guides, as familiar and intimate advisors and know that we can and are worthy of remaining in Indochina.”[14] The author of the piece was adamant that unlike “some tribes in Africa”, Vietnam had been a powerful nation with a deep literary culture and well-behaved people prior to the arrival of the French. Writing to represent himself as well as the Vietnamese elites, he reiterated that it was “the wish of the Vietnamese people” to receive material and spiritual enlightenment from the *mission civilisatrice*, and reminded the French and colonial governments to fulfil their promise of a just and benevolent rule for Indochina.

Colonial Nostalgia

In lieu of a definite, definitive conclusion, I would like to offer a more personal reflection on the mechanics of colonial nostalgia: at the time of writing, the National Archives Centre I in Hanoi is hosting an exhibition entitled “Đấu xảo – Nơi tinh hoa hội tụ” *(Exposition – Where the cream of the crop converged)* from January 25 to June 30, 2024. The exhibition features more than 300 archival items including official documentations, promotional posters, correspondences, and historical photographs from the National Library of France, Vietnam National Archives I, and private collections – many publicised for the first time. It chronicles the emergence of colonial expositions in colonial Vietnam following the French conquest: starting with the first expositions in Gia Định (modern-day Ho Chi Minh City, 1865) and Hanoi (1887), to the construction of *Nhà đấu xảo* (Grand Palais de l'Exposition) for the 1902 Hanoi Exhibition, til the last exposition in Hanoi in 1941. At the same time, the exhibition charts the participation and representations of Indochina, more specifically Vietnam, in international expositions in France – Paris (1878, 1889, 1900, 1925, 1931, 1937), Lyon (1894, 1914), and Marseilles (1906, 1922); in Europe (Brussels 1910); and in the United States (Chicago 1893, San Francisco 1904, New York 1939). Together, the combination of archives and exhibition panels tells the story of how the Vietnamese participation at the world's fairs grew from a modest number within the French's larger display of colonial conquests and victories, to gaining its own position and agency, becoming bigger in size, quantity, and increasingly more sophisticated in the quality of products and performances. These participations not only boasted to the world the advancements in commerce, industries, and constructions in Indochina, but also connected producers, investors, and consumers from France and overseas with the alluring Far East.

In press releases and news reports for the exhibition, we can observe how Vietnamese writers praise the brilliance of traditional Vietnamese arts and crafts displayed at these colonial expositions as evidence of how the Vietnamese had “brought our bells to play in faraway lands” and won over the hearts and minds of Western audiences with the products' “exquisiteness, elegance, and uniqueness.”[15] A century apart, Vietnamese-language press discourses still share the same pride that the Vietnamese participation in colonial expositions in general and at the Paris Colonial Exposition 1931 in particular was a chance to showcase the fullest economic potentials and authentic cultural characteristics of Vietnam. It was also on the world's stage where Franco-Vietnamese collaboration wasn't a sheer promise but a palpable reality for the Vietnamese. And I, I have never been to Paris, and despite disagreeing with this mode of colonial nostalgia, I still share with my follow compatriots, then and now, a desire to go see Paris. To see and desire my naïve native self in a thousand exotic and quixotic mirrors of postcolonial yearning. To see what had been, what could have been, and what will never be.

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Notes

1 Patricia A. Morton. “National and Colonial: The Musée des Colonies at the Colonial Exposition, Paris, 1931”. *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 2 (June 1998): 357-377; Carole Sweeney. “‘Le tour du monde en quatre jours’: empire, exhibition, and the surrealist disorder of things.” *Textual Practice* 19, no. 1 (2005): 131-147; Panivong Norindr. *Phantaqsmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature.* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 23. Norindr gave the number as 33 million tickets; Sweeney cited 3 million tickets; while Morton cited 33 million entries, including free entrance, multiple and singular entries (around 8 million individual visitors).

2 “Cuộc đấu xảo lớn nhứt tại thành Paris” [The grandest-ever exposition in Paris]. *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn* [Six Provinces Gazette], December 21, 27, 28, 30, 1929.

3 “Thể-lệ dự cuộc Đấu-xảo Thuộc-địa Liệt-quốc tại Paris năm 1931” [Regulations to participate in the Universal Colonial Exposition in Paris in 1931]. *Đông Pháp thới báo* [Indochina Times], 641, Oct 29, 1927; “Xứ Bắc kỳ tại cuộc đấo sảo thuộc địa năm 1931” [Tonkin at the Colonial Exposition in 1931]. *Đông Phương* [The Orient], 9, November 13, 1929; “Cuộc đấu-xảo thuộc-địa Cùng các nhà công-nghệ Việt-Nam” [The Colonial Exposition with Vietnamese Industrialists]. *Hà Thành ngọ báo* [Hanoi Noon News], 733, Jan 15, 1930, etc.

4 “Sau cuộc bay của quan Toàn-quyền Pasquier” [After Governor-General Pasquier's Flight]. *Thanh Nghệ Tĩnh tân văn* [Thanh Nghệ Tĩnh Gazette], 25, January 9, 1931; “Ông Reynaud, ông Pasquier nói chuyện bắng điện-thoại với Saigon ta” [Monsieur Reynaud, Monsieur Pasquier speak on the phone with our Saigon]. *Hà Thành ngọ báo* [Hanoi Noon News], 1102, April 16, 1931.

5 “Được cử sang dự kỳ đấu xảo thuộc địa Paris” [Those selected to participate in the Paris Exposition]. *Nông Công thương (Nhật Báo)* [Agriculture and Commerce (Daily)], 585, January 17, 1931; “Sang dự cuộc đấo sảo Paris” [Going to attend the Paris Exposition], *Thòi báo (Hà Nội)* [The Times (Hanoi)], 18, March 4, 1931.

6 “Dư luận Pháp công nhận cô Năm Phỉ là một vị đào hát tài tình.” [The French media recognises that Miss Năm Phỉ is a talented actress]. *Hà Thành ngọ báo* [Hanoi Noon News], 1164, July 2, 1931.

7 “Tội nay, gánh Phước-Xương hát tuồng “Hỏa thiêu Hồng-Liên-Tự” [Tonight, the Phước-Xương [sic] troupe will perform the play “The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple”]. *Trung lập báo* [Neutral News], 6401, March 27, 1931. The advertisement for Nguyễn Văn Chim was placed directly above.

8 “Chim Giao được làm Đại biểu thể thao sang Pháp” [Chim and Giao named sports representatives to France]. *Thực nghiệp dân báo* [People's Practical Industry News], 3050, January 27, 1931; “Ngày 24 Mars Ông Triệu-văn-Yên Chim và Giao sẽ đi qua Pháp” [On 24 March, Mrs Triệu-văn-Yên, Chim and Giao will depart for France]. *Sài Gòn* [Saigon], 52, January 23, 1931.

9 “Hai nhà vô-địch quần vợt Chim và Giao đại bại ợ sân quần Auteuil” [Two champions Chim and Giao suffered great defeats at Auteuil stadium]. *Nông Công thương (Nhật báo)* [Agriculture and Commerce (Daily)], 688, May 24, 1931; “Roland-Garros 1931 (Grand Slam) – men singles.” *Fédération Française de Tennis* 1931.

10 “Một chuyện hửu ích. M. Lê-văn-Đức sẻ chỉ cách đi Tây cho nhửng người chưa thạo.” [A useful idea. M. Lê-văn-Đức will share his experience travelling to France to inexperienced audience]. *Sài Gòn* [Saigon], 35, January 2, 1931; “Ngày 1er Février tới đây tại trường Taberd (Saigon)” [On this upcoming 1st of February at the Taberd School (Saigon)], *Trung lập báo* [Neutral News], 6360, January 30, 1931.

11 “Ai muốn đi coi Paris?” [Who wants to go see Paris?], *Hà Thành ngọ báo* [Hanoi Noon News], April 4, 9, 10, 1931; “Ai muốn đi coi Paris?” [Who wants to go see Paris?], *Trung lập báo* [Neutral News], March 10, 12, 14, 17, 20, 21, 26, 30, 1931; “Hình Mỷ-Thuật” [Fine Art Photography], *Trung lập báo* [Neutral News], 6601, November 27, 1931.

12 “Ai muốn sang Pháp?” [Who wants to go to France?]. *Hà Thành ngọ báo* [Hanoi Noon News], 1098, April 11, 1931.

13 Panivong Norindr. *Phantasmatic Indochina*, pp. 34-51.

14 Nam-Dương, “Chánh-sách nào hợp dân-vọng” [Which policy is the most suitable for the people's wish?] Hà *Hà Thành ngọ báo* [Hanoi Noon News], 1305, December 19, 1931. An earlier, fuller version of Albert Sarraut's words translated into Vietnamese can be found on “Ông Albert Sarraut Lại nói về sự cai trị của nước Pháp ở Đông-dương” [Monsieur Albert Sarraut Discusses Again French Rule over Indochina]. *Nông Công thương (Nhật báo)* [Agriculture and Commerce (Daily)], 806, October 15, 1931. My English translation.

15 “Triển lãm “Đấu xảo – Nơi tinh hoa hội tụ” [Exhibition “Expositions – Where the cream of the crop converged”]. *Trung Tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia I*, January 18, 2024. https://archives.org.vn/gioi-thieu-tai-lieu-nghiep-vu/trien-lam-%E2%80%9Cdau-xao-noi-tinh-hoa-hoi-tu%E2%80%9D.htm

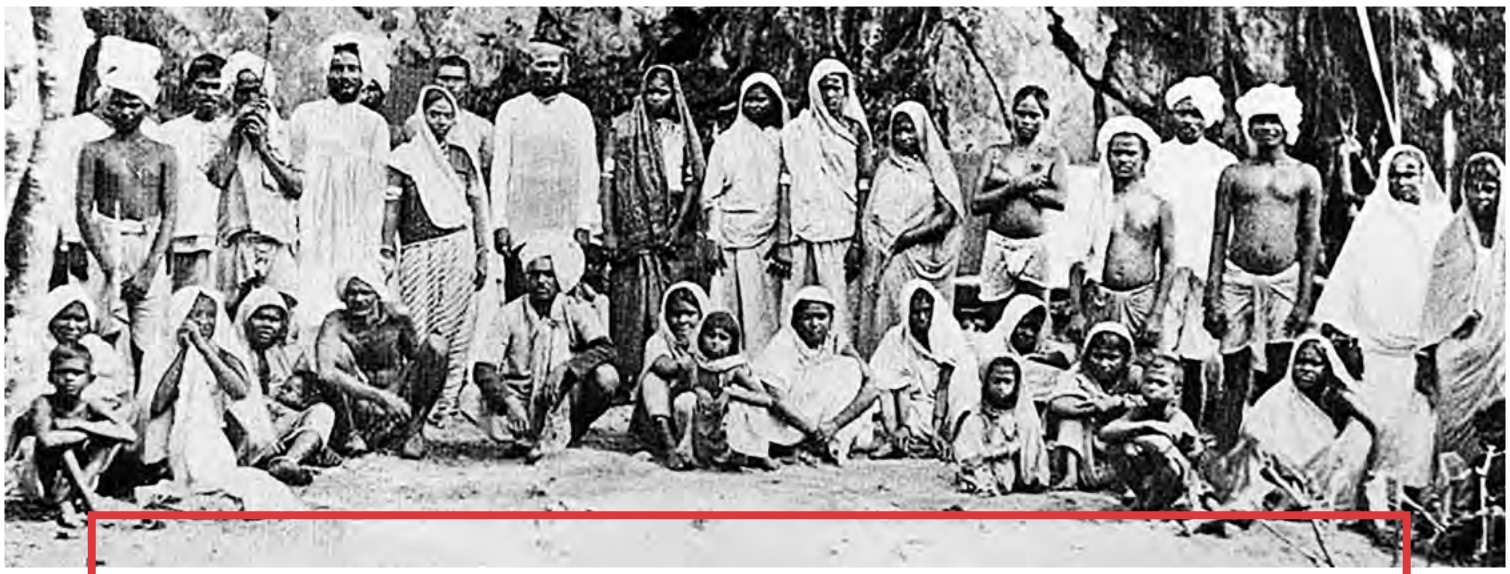

Fig. 1 (above): Newly arrived Indian coolies in Trinidad, c. 1897. Image in public domain and available via Wikimedia Commons.

Politics and Poetics of Land in the History of Indentured Labour in Trinidad

Shayeari Dutta

The introduction of Indian indentured labour in the British colony of Trinidad, lasted from 1834 to 1917. During this period, evolving racial taxonomies in Trinidad's plural society ascribed the "Coolie" label to Indian workers engaged in sugarcane estates of the region as a means to codify their labour in ethnic terms. In an already polarized society this kind of negative ascription further antagonized race relations among Africans and Indians vying for limited resources and employment opportunities. Significantly, the deliberate act of ethnification of labouring bodies had its spatial dimension insofar as East Indian labourers were largely concentrated in the rural belts in and around sugarcane plantations, whereas urban sectors were dominated by ex-slaves. Indo-Trinidadian rural life – stigmatized by a rhetoric of backwardness, cultural insularity, and political indifference – went on to structure the indentured workers' and their descendants' relationship with land. At the same time, communal living allowed a semblance of cultural continuity with the homeland, while helping them negotiate their place within a culturally alien society. In the process, rural land possession became a marker of stability as well as an opportunity for backward caste groups to re-write their 'fate.' Thus, in the collective consciousness of this ethnic group, the "Coolie" identity became intrinsically linked to contradictory impulses originating in a notion of 'land' that was both constricting and liberating.

The distinctiveness of 'land' as a stable category marked by the cartographic tyranny of Empire was in fact destabilized by instances of flight, dispossession, violent assertions of ownership, and reclamation of an altered sense of belongingness by the estate worker. In the post-indenture period, changing socioeconomic circumstances have produced rural-to-urban migrations within Trinidadian society, thereby making urban-centric land negotiation a new factor in acquiring status. 'Land-locked' narratives offered by colonial ledgers and reports thus prove inadequate towards understanding the essentially transoceanic nature of indenture legacies. The inherent fictiveness associated with practices of labour recruitment and management, with enduring consequences for future generations of diasporic Indians, points towards the significance of alternate forms of 'story-telling' by descendants of indentured labourers. A literary analysis of the same, focused on an ongoing process of negotiation with evolving ideas of land ownership and aspiration in post-colonial Trinidad, would help understand the tangible and affective dimensions of the community's homing desire far away from 'home.'

Context

The 1833 Act of Abolition of slavery in British colonies prompted planters in the Caribbean and Mauritius to devise other means to address the problem of acquiring cheap labour for their estates.[1] A heterogeneous labour force in early 19th century Caribbean occasioned by the gradual termination of the shipping of African slaves challenged the plantocracy's "ideal model" by disrupting systems of labour control previously designed to maximize profit. Part of this coercive mechanism entailed "a blend of demographic and psychosocial perceptions" inherent to the system of labour allocation.[2] Consequently, apart from low wages, arbitrary racial taxonomies were devised to exacerbate inter-racial antagonisms as a counter to solidarity movements among diverse working-class populations agitating for better work conditions. The logic of efficiency governing monocultural regimes of the Caribbean depended on remembering and re-instituting such 'essential' cultural differences. It explains the persistence of strategies of "competitive victimhood" underscoring Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian politics in the Caribbean region both before and after independence.

Gaiutra Bahadur traces the evolution of the 'Coolie' label (from the Tamil word '*kuli*'/ கூலி meaning wages or hire) from its first usage in the late 16th century by Portuguese captains and merchants along the Coromandel Coast in India to denote "the men who carried loads at the docks," to its broader lexical definition of cheap unskilled labour from Asia.[3] In the 1830s the term came to be identified with indentured labourers recruited by the British government to work on colonial plantations. As a homogenizing tactic, the label sought to erase caste-class distinctions while signifying the group's racially-determined marginalization in the hierarchized sugar estate. Yet, the reductive "Coolie" ascription underscored contradictions inherent to this "technology of emigration"[3] launched by British administrators. While the indenture system was projected as being far removed from the excesses of slavery, it was nonetheless a thoroughly exploitative regime based on the urgent economic needs of Empire. The plantation labourer's association with the land on which he toiled was defined by a series of lies, obfuscations, and myth-making necessary for the sustenance of the capitalist order. It was therefore at this discursive juncture that the 'coolie' identity was both formulated and challenged.

With reference to the history of Indian indentured labour recruitment, the trauma of displacement and desire for an altered sense of homecoming are both tied to the politics and poetics of land. Several patterns of displacement brought potential recruits to the Calcutta depot. Factors such as an increase in taxation, de-industrialization, commercialization, colonial expropriation, draught, famine, population density, and caste-related incidents produced a landless peasantry and prompted migration towards other districts and cities. Here labourers enlisted for the Caribbean were offered a vision of plenty in which land ownership figured prominently for those who had been dispossessed of home and hearth. However, the myth of the Caribbean as a labourer's paradise was countered by realities of an incongruous inter-continental system. Instances of disorder and rioting on the plantations attested to the extent of misinformation fed to recruits at the depots regarding the nature of their work. Even as the coolie was subjected to a regime of colonial stratification, all such attempts at initiating him into a rigid penal regime were undercut by the government's own efforts at grounding indentured labour recruitment in a narrative of 'consent.'

Negotiating land, literacy, and aspiration

At the heart of the narrative of consent lay the issue of choice, predicated on a five-year tenure of indentured labour. At the end of his term a labourer could return to his native place or extend his work tenure or even dissociate himself from the indenture system by choosing to remain in the colony and engage in other kinds of occupation. Yet the illusory nature of 'choice' became evident. Often the promised wage was not paid upon entering into the system, which in itself obstructed plans of return and re-settlement in one's native place. In the 1860s, Crown Lands around the "sugar belts" of Southern and Western Trinidad were offered primarily in exchange for a return passage and later for both lease and sale. This led, to a certain extent, to the proliferation of Indian villages inhabited by ex-indentured labourers engaged in independent cane farming and subsistence agriculture. In reality, however, such lands were hard to come by. The merchant-planter class had absolute monopoly over land which enabled them to bind labour to the estates and discourage subsistence farming. Crown Lands were expensive, and governmental policies discouraged squatting, such that land could be kept "out of the reach of the masses in order to preserve the estate labour force"; moreover, a biased justice system instituted severe penalties for violation of governmental labour laws.[4] At the same time, racialized narratives of rural-urban divide – predicated on the black-white axis of Trinidad's plural society to which the Indian had arrived late and subsequently been relegated to a separate tier – posited the post-indenture Indian community of Trinidad as a backward, inward-looking, and socio-culturally alien agricultural group.[5]

Land was an ambivalent legacy of indenture. "Coolies" and their descendants both aspired toward the security and self-sufficiency offered by it, but at the same time, longed to escape the entwined association between rurality and backwardness. In the run-up to Trinidad's independence (1962), and after, the correlation between rural residence and socio-economic backwardness was strengthened by the notion of status acquisition concentrated on the industrialized city centre with its emphasis on professional jobs. Although a small group of urban Indians constituted the rising middle class engaged in the professions or operating as small businessmen, a majority of them remained tied to the agricultural land in popular imagination. The question that arises at this juncture is regarding the value of land as an aspirational commodity inevitably linked to a traumatic past. While the acquisition of Crown lands close to the estates offered means of subsistence away from the horrors of indenture work, it was the same ancestral land which came to the descendants as generational trauma linked to the inception of the "Coolie" designation in the depots of Calcutta. It was the same land which referred to the sugarcane estates where land and labouring body were conflated within an economy of social stratification. If the propensity of the indentured body was to bend, or twist, or fold, then this instinct became a kind of psychological inheritance which successive generations of Indian immigrants sought to reverse by securing their bodies *out of the fields* through education and migration to the cities.

In colonial Trinidad literacy and ethno-religious identity have had deep links, particularly for East Indians. Perceptions of backwardness regarding the Indians' religious practices and cultural habits – buttressed by a system of Christian missionary school education – often presented literacy itself as a contentious topic. While fears of cultural assimilation acted as a deterrent for many Indians who felt that their traditional institutions were at risk given the pedagogical structures governing colonial missionary schools in the region, literacy was also regarded as a means to rise above their denigrated status. Conservative religious bodies such as the Hindu Mahasabha, operating primarily as cultural gatekeepers for the larger Hindu community in Trinidad, were often in conflict with modernizing trends among middle-class Indians, for whom colonial education offered access to the political life of the Caribbean. Ambition among Indo-Trinidadian descendants of indentured labourers has thus been seen as a complex of racial, ethno-religious, and social factors indicative of the "assumed antagonisms of Afro- and Indo-Caribbean people."[6]

Contemporary literary interventions

The centrality of spatial signifiers of status and prestige based on evolving notions of land in a developing nation has been of particular concern to Indo-Trinidadians, who had arrived belatedly in a racially stratified nation. The colonial myth of light labour and plentiful land fed to a vastly agricultural population – alienated from their native soil for a variety of reasons – couched indentureship in the language of reclamation, albeit in newer forms, in radically altered surroundings. Rural Indians' relationship with land, mediated as it was by caste-class and gender distinctions, had its affective dimension insofar as visions of the native village evoked both communal feelings of rootedness and memories of discrimination. What the indenture scheme offered was attractive social and economic dividends minus the horrors of poverty, hunger, and caste and gender violence. In the contemporary literature of Indian-origin writers reflecting on Trinidadian society, the imbrication of literacy, social mobility, and apprehensions of cultural loss among descendants of indentured labourers has been a recurrent theme inhering in notions of rootlessness and re-possession. If the originary point of access to an altered reality is the estate land offered in popular colonial discourse as the land of possibilities, then how far does the reality of incarceration and dehumanizing labour allow both ex-labourers as well as descendants of indenture to re-imagine land acquisition as a wholly separate and disconnected act? Here 'land' is variously configured as a performative arena where both generational trauma and modern aspirations are interlocked entities.

Cereus Blooms at Night
SHANI MOOTOO
FIREFLIES
SHIVA NAIPAUL

Fig.2: Covers of *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mootoo (Published by HarperCollins, 1999) and *Fireflies* by Shiva Naipaul (Published by André Deutsch, 1970)

Indo-Trinidadian author Shani Mootoo's 1996 novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* describes Ramchandin as a lower-caste indentured labourer from India whose presence in the barracks of the fictional island of Lantanacamara raises the possibilities of slipping out of his inherited destiny as a lowly labourer. Ramchandin and his wife imagined that by honouring the demands of labour, the indenture estate could function as a dynamic site for articulating a radically separate future for their son. Yet the monocultural logic of estate land does not allow that. Wendy Wolford's recognition of the plantation as an ideal for "organized, rational, and efficient production and governance," by which all other landscapes and people are alienated, attests to the dominant work ethic of this system of labour.[7] The pervasive nature of this ethic of productivity was equated in old man Ramchandin's mind with the folklores of plenty, liberty, and opportunity fed to potential labourers by recruiters back in India. However, the desire to "educate Chandin out of the fields" was undercut by Chandin's own troubled relationship with an inheritance that was both biological and social; the plantation logic of indentured labour claimed the labouring body as part of the larger organization of capital while lacerating future generations with the trauma of this legacy. In fact, Chandin's desire to educate himself out of his troubled legacy does not discriminate between the sugarcane estates to which his parents were bound and the land which they acquired later as free agricultural labourers. Both constitute an uninterrupted terrain whose texture and essence would not change so long as the labourer's body was indelibly signified as the site of cultural backwardness, atavistic religious practices, and servility.

Chandin himself is unable to dissociate between the generational shame characterizing his family's relationship with land and his own homing ambitions. When he buys cheap land in an underdeveloped locality, he is struck by the persistence of a feeling of captivity and failure attending his desire to build a life unburdened by history. The sense that his parents suffered from a poverty of ambition is projected on to the wooden house he builds in the typical style of modest Indian dwellings. In the novel, existing modes of racialization structure Chandin's material and affective relationship with land and agricultural labour. The ghost of the plantation bears upon other practices on the land insofar as the intimate relationship between indentured labour and subsistence farming continue to generate contradictory emotions. Chandin's self-loathing is mediated both by his consciousness of the black-white axis of society, by which dignity and status are determined, as well as his belief in the binding effect of indenture land on the mind and body of his father.

With regard to the Indian community of Trinidad, Nobel laureate V. S. Naipaul has referred to their cloistered village lives as being devoid of any sense of time and history. Rural Indian diaspora's cultural poverty was, in Naipaul's estimate, due to the absence of a "framework of social convention" which might have produced a culture of reading and writing.[8] What remained of India was a simplistic rendering of Indian village life without the kind of social stratifications which had anchored them to their subcontinental reality. In a sense, cultural insularity based on a collective anxiety of assimilation had been achieved at the cost of economic and political deprivation. Naipaul's description of a typical Indian village in Trinidad is scathing in its critique of an aesthetic of quaintness and tradition, masking the community's inherent backwardness. As explicated in his 1961 novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*, the battle between clan life and individualistic aspirations would no longer be fought over the possession of a piece of rural land meant to simulate a constrictive communal identity. Looking towards the more culturally heterogeneous city, epitomized by Port of Spain, Mr. Biswas envisions a radically modern dream of building a home which would be strictly his own, in his own name. Although the protagonist's struggle is couched in the language of failed rebellion, the poignancy of his condition inheres in his belief in social mobility as an escape from the stronghold of ancestral land and its associated racial prejudices. This shift towards the city reconfigures diasporic longings for home since the emotive potency of rural land as the site of identity preservation lessens over time with changing societal conditions.

V. S. Naipaul's younger brother, Shiva Naipaul explores this rigid aspect of clan life among rural-based tradition-bound Indo-Trinidadians in his 1970 novel *Fireflies*. Much like *A House*, *Fireflies* also explores the theme of aspiration as a breakaway from the toxic confines of family hearth and home. Here the Khoja clan is representative of the anti-assimilationist camp whose legitimacy among fellow Indians derived from its rejection of modernity. Those who had sold off their lands in predominantly Indian rural belts and established their home in the city, 'joined the professions,' or converted to Christianity are seen as betrayers of the community. The projection of the postcolonial city as a land of opportunities was counteracted by apprehensions of a racially biased process of creolization necessarily stripping the Indo-Carib of his cultural identity in the name of integration and mobility. The industrializing city became the epicentre of socio-economic opportunity for both working- and middle-class Indians migrating out of a typically agricultural economy, while enclaves of elite Indian residences, professions, and businesses carved out newer avenues of power and prestige. The desire to be integrated, thus, reformulated 'land' in the imagination of aspiring Indians. It became imperative for many middle-class Indians to integrate themselves within the emergent economic order occasioned by global neoliberal trends and national modernization efforts concentrated on urban centres. To own land in certain upscale urban locales became both an assertion of status in Trinidadian plural society as well as a means to become relevant within the political process. The effort was also to disengage from the enfeebling legacy of the "Coolie" identity and its connections with rurality in popular discourse.

In Shani Mootoo's 2005 novel *He Drown She at Sea*, urbanized conclaves dominated by elite Indians in the fictional Caribbean island of Guanagaspar highlight the divisive nature of intracommunal relations between educated middle class Indians on one hand, and rural working class Indians on the other. The focus here is on the possession of land recast as modern concrete homes in exclusive neighbourhoods as opposed to traditional wooden houses built on *mudra* stilts characteristically associated with Indian villages. In the context of *Fireflies*, the abandonment of rural land by Indians and the investment of that money towards gaining access to a more cosmopolitan sphere of influence involved acquiring an English education, speaking predominantly in English, becoming doctors and engineers, and buying lavish homes in the city. While the Khojas cast such tendencies in negative terms, Naipaul's critical lens is directed primarily at the thousands of acres of poorly cultivated Khoja land that had become empty signifiers of their fiercely protected backwardness. The novel refers to the utter destitution of the countryside dominated by villages named after Indian cities such as Lucknow, Calcutta, and Benaras. The visual metaphor of villages lost among sugarcane fields makes it impossible to disassociate plantation from independently owned land. This spatial overlapping also conflates history and myth, foregrounded by the vision of indigent peasants and their children returning from the fields. Much like Mr. Biswas, the protagonist of *Firelies*, Ram Lutchman, soon learns that all this land belongs to his in-laws' family, the Khojas. Crucially, a feudal logic of control dominates the clan's ownership of land, and in Ram's mind, acknowledgment of his own troubled association with the Khojas would arrest him within that timeless image of quaint Indian village life.

Following the oil boom (1973-1982), when OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) raised the price of Arabian crude oil and Trinidad (a non-OPEC member) could make a profit by selling its own crude oil at a much higher price, most of the economic benefits were concentrated in the urban sectors. It was equally the case that the PNM government headed by Eric Williams was often perceived by Indians as an urbanized African party averse to programmes of actual wealth distribution among all groups. The simultaneous decline of the agricultural sector generated a need for other sources of employment. Thus, the city re-imagined 'land' as a source of status creation in response to the changing economic conditions, which in turn accelerated the rate of rural-urban migration and triggered urban stress and unemployment primarily among working class Indians and Africans. Urban squalor caused by unidirectional migratory trends produced urban surplus labour and aggravated the problem of "structural imbalances between urban and rural areas."[9] It is no wonder then that successive Indian-origin authors have sought to interrogate the intra-communal dynamics between Indians residing in upscale urban enclaves of Trinidad and those inhabiting peripheries of the city centre. What becomes evident through such literary interrogations is the fragile nature of the rhetoric of loss-induced camaraderie among Indian indentured labourers migrating across the world.

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Accidental Conservatives?

Economic Technocrats and Modernization in New Order Indonesia

Iqra Anugrah

As a set of ideas, conservatism conjures certain images in our public discourses. In politics, conservatism is associated with resistance to progress, a defense of hierarchy, and a hidden predilection for authoritarianism. In culture, conservatism implies an attachment to tradition and norms, skepticism of recent trends, and morality policing. At its core, conservatism is a philosophy-cum-movement of reaction against egalitarian demands, marked by a high degree of pragmatism and flexibility.[1]

What is sometimes missing in this conversation is the role of economic conservatism in sustaining conservative politics and cultural ethos. Without the implementation of conservative principles in economic realms, the sustenance of a conservative state and societal order becomes untenable.

The defense of a supposed natural hierarchy, according to the orthodox conservative thinking, requires a principled approach against the horrors of statist collectivism. In postwar Western conservative thought, this translates into a preference for market capitalism, which overlaps with the emerging neoliberal faith in the free market. The works of economists such as Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, and James M. Buchanan featured prominently in conservative political circles. These were embraced by campus activists, intellectuals, political operators, and the highest echelon of leaders such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Despite severe methodological disagreements among the three economists – Friedman believed in empirical positivism, while Hayek and Buchanan preferred a more wide-ranging, social theory approach – they all hailed the virtue of the free market and formulated political and moral justifications for it.[2]

But what if this opposition against statist collectivism originated from a more *incidental* conjuncture? What if the ideational inspirations for such an opposition were more *eclectic*? What if the proponents of this idea, inadvertently, embraced conservative politics? This is exactly what happened in the Global South. In her creative investigation on the entangled histories of midcentury Colombia and the United States, the historian Amy C. Offner shows how ideas and policies developed and implemented under the zenith of developmental and welfare state eras were later refashioned and repurposed – in her words, "sorted out" – to tear down such paradigms and pave the way for neoliberalism.[3] In modernizing parts of Asia such as Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines, (limited) land reform was instituted after the Second World War as a bulwark against agrarian radicalism and Communism.

This essay focuses on three major technocrats: Widjojo Nitisastro (1927-2012) [Fig. 1], Ali Wardhana (1928-2015) [Fig. 2], and Emil Salim (b. 1930) [Fig. 3]. These US-educated economists – famously known as the Berkeley Mafia – served as ministers for the New Order government, oversaw its capitalist reforms, and engaged with the public as educators and public intellectuals. They were not "classical" conservatives in the Western sense, but the *élan vital* of their vision was conservative, rooted in the fear of destructive "ideological" mobilization and, in contrast, in a faith in the "rationality" of capitalist planning. Their engagement with and later embrace of conservative politics was a result of political necessities in the context of authoritarian consolidation. Therefore, they are best described, I would argue, as *accidental conservatives*.

Fig. 1: Widjojo Nitisastro as Coordinating Minister for Economics, Finance, and Industry of Indonesia at the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI) conference in Amsterdam, 1977 (Photo courtesy of Rob C. Croes / Anefo and Nationaal Archief, retrieved from Wikimedia Commons)

In this context, studying the lives and thoughts of these economic technocrats who served the authoritarian New Order government (1966-1998) becomes a crucial endeavor. Caricatural descriptions of the technocrats depict them as either saviors of the Indonesian nation or intellectual stooges of imperialism. There are some truths in these accounts – the technocrats stabilized the Indonesian economy for rapid capitalist development and had close links with Western financial and development institutions. But they overlook the complexity and nuances of economic ideas, political and emotional motives, and the agency of the technocrats.

From an analytical standpoint, reducing the oeuvres of the technocrats into simple categories risks losing sight of the broader resonance and novelty of their thinking. Their ideas, actions, and policies were not lesser copies or cheap imitations of Western conservative and neoliberal economic and philosophical thought. There is a degree of sophistication in the technocrats' brand of economics that we should admit and grapple with, regardless of one's political affiliations. Studying the parallels and divergences of their thinking with Western economic conservatism will allow us to better comprehend the novelty and creativity of a major strand in conservatism in Indonesia and the Global South.

Equally important, understanding the complexity of their brand of conservatism and its policy implications will help progressive social movements, activists, and intellectuals to know their political rivals better and formulate alternative economic policies beyond mainstream economic prescriptions.

The prelude: Sukarno's Guided Democracy (1959-1965) and its bourgeois opposition

Guided Democracy emerged as a response to the instability of Indonesia's early experimentation with parliamentary democracy (1950-1959), a noble undertaking tainted by the political elites' constant jockeying, regional rebellions in resource-rich provinces, and the reluctance of the state and capitalist class to accommodate labor demands.

Impatient with the liberal democratic procedures, Sukarno and the Armed Forces installed the Guided Democracy government, which was led by Sukarno and supported by the Armed Forces and the Communist Party of Indonesia (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI). Guided Democracy was typical of left-wing Bonapartist governments popular across the postcolonial Global South – think about Julius Nyerere's *Ujamaa* socialism in Tanzania or Arab socialism in the Middle East, for example.[4] Though illiberal, and sometimes outright authoritarian, it was committed to participatory and economic democracy through active political participation of the lower class, extensive land reform, and control over foreign capital.

But this springtime for democratic class struggle was a nightmare for the budding bourgeois opposition against Guided Democracy. Leading anti-Communist student activists of different persuasions, such as the Catholic conservative Jusuf Wanandi and the liberal-oriented Nono Anwar Makarim, cited increasing state power and leftist political and cultural hegemony as definitive proofs of Sukarno's "totalitarianism."[5]

For the young economists at that time, including the three future technocrats, it was Guided Democracy's economic misadventures that triggered them the most. Consider a series of speeches made by Widjojo Nitisastro, then a professor of economics at the School of Economics at the University of Indonesia (UI) between 1963-1966. He championed rational economic development based on modern – that is to say, Western – economics methods. This was a direct refutation of Sukarno's dismissal of economic sciences as "useless textbook thinking." Such dismissal, Widjojo argued, had resulted in high inflation and high prices. To bolster the socialist flavor of his argument, he quoted the argument for economic planning by Oskar Lange, the Polish neo-Marxist economist. In a key speech delivered in early January 1966 in front of the anti-Sukarno student activists and UI professors, Widjojo criticized the government's economic and financial policies.

A section of his speech is worth quoting at length: "When the government urges the people to make sacrifices following the raising of taxes, levies, prices, tariffs and other fees in order to boost its earnings, *it is only natural for the people to see it as a moral duty for the government to set concrete examples by effectively slashing its spending first*. What the government has done is exactly the opposite. It had raised prices and tariffs enormously, even before it attempted to prove that it could tone down its spending first."[6] Citing the American Marxist economist Paul Baran's essay on the social role of engaged intellectuals, Widjojo saw himself and other anti-Sukarno dissidents as social critics who served the people.

Disillusionment with Guided Democracy's economic policies was also expressed by Emil Salim and Ali Wardhana, two other prominent members of the economists' guild. Salim, the only living member among the three, is an eclectic economist who learned from diverse intellectual traditions, such as cooperative society, non-Communist socialism, and market economics. Upon his return to Indonesia after finishing his PhD at Berkeley, Salim was appalled by

Fig. 2: Ali Wardhana as Coordinating Minister for Economics, Finance, and Industry of Indonesia at the IGGI conference in Den Haag, 1986, with Eegje Schoo, Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation. (Photo courtesy of Rob C. Croes / Anefo and Nationaal Archief, retrieved from Wikimedia Commons)

Sukarno's antagonistic stance against mainstream economics. He complained, "I did not recognise my own country."[7] A similar concern about inflation was also conveyed by Ali. In a research paper aptly titled "Inflation and Structural Tensions" *(Inflasi dan Ketegangan Strukturil)*, Ali too advocated a policy to combat inflation hemorrhaging the Indonesian economy.[8]

Thus, when a golden opportunity presented itself, the technocrats soon seized it. In the aftermath of a failed move to neutralize the anti-Communist High Command of the Army by left-leaning army officers, the Army and the anti-Sukarno coalition of students, activists, and intellectuals launched a counterrevolution to unseat Sukarno, obliterate the communists and their sympathizers, and establish the New Order government. After winning a major political battle against Sukarno's statism, the technocrats soon implemented capitalist reforms under their aegis.

The revolutionary, eclectic origins of the technocrats' conservative vision

In contrast to postwar Western conservatives, who were mostly influenced by neoliberal theorists and the horrors of two World Wars, the Indonesian accidental conservatives – the technocrats – had a very different starting point in terms of their political experience and ideological inspirations. To better understand their consequential ideas and actions, we need to look at their intellectual and social history.

First, they were all committed to anti-colonialism. Born in a middle-class family, Widjojo participated in the National Revolution (1945-1949) by joining a student militia and fighting battles against the invading Dutch colonial forces. So did Emil Salim, who was once even captured by the Dutch troops. Meanwhile, Ali Wardhana, whose uncle was the nationalist leader Ali Sastroamidjojo, worked part-time as a clerk at a travel agency to support himself while studying economics at UI. In one way or another, they all come from a petty-bourgeois or proto-bourgeois background, and each of their families participated in the National Revolution.

Second, unlike their more doctrinaire Western counterparts, they were more eclectic and pragmatic. During their undergraduate days at UI, they retained a distrust towards Dutch-style colonial capitalism. However, they found Third World philosophical critiques of colonial capitalism too jargonistic and lacking analytical sophistication. This theoretical cul-de-sac attracted them to modern (capitalist) economic methods taught in the United States.

Their American training at Berkeley taught them the necessary econometric methods to substantiate their prior economic beliefs. But this did not necessarily make them zealot believers in unfettered capitalism. Their conviction was emboldened by their military combat experience and political participation in the early years of the newly-independent Indonesian republic. Philosophically, they were attracted by a range of diverse ideas, including non-Communist socialism, Keynesianism, state-led developmentalism, and modern econometrics. Salim, for instance, focused on Egyptian economic development and institutions under Gamal Abdel Nasser. Indonesia was developing a socialist economy, and he believed that, therefore, the country needed to learn from other Third World states experimenting with a socialist economic model beyond Western capitalism and Soviet socialism. Widjojo, who was already considered to be more pro-market compared to his peers, was a Keynesian, something that would make him a heretic in the eyes of Western fanboys of Hayek, Keynes, or Buchanan. More practically, Ali Wardhana specialized in monetary policy in Indonesia, which was the subject of his PhD dissertation and a timely topic in the context of hyperinflation under Sukarno's government.

Fig. 3: Emil Salim as Minister of Environmental Affairs, official portrait for the New Order Third Development Cabinet, 1985 (Photo in Public Domain, courtesy of the Government of Indonesia, retrieved from Wikimedia Commons)

What makes them *conservative* then? Here, it is important to identify the commonalities and parallels between Western conservatives and Indonesian technocrats. The technocrats' radical economic vision, at its core, is conservative for the following reasons. First, their politics is a politics of fear by another means. Though their main concern was Sukarno's economic mismanagement, they also shared the fear of – and anger at – the perceived "ideological" mobilization of Guided Democracy and its statism. This was a major concern of anti-Sukarno student intellectuals such as Wanandi and Makarim and conservative thinkers such as General Ali Moertopo.[9]

Secondly, they viewed economics not as bourgeois or imperialist "useless thinking," but rather as a modern and rigorous body of knowledge that could provide "rational," scientific solutions for Indonesia's excessive statism, social and political polarization, and ballooning inflation. This emphasis on rationality was a major rhetorical device and ideological weapon used by the bourgeois opposition against Sukarno and the communists. Therefore, for the technocrats, pro-market economics of various traditions became a tool to exorcise the specter of inflationary, anti-growth statism. Recall Widjojo's 1966 speech. His critical indignation at Guided Democracy's hyperinflation and excessive spending is a familiar chorus for anti-government conservatives, neoliberals, and libertarians.

Third, as ministers of the New Order government, these economists saw themselves as fine gentlemen entrusted with the *noblesse oblige* task of applying the economic scientific methods to solve Indonesia's underdevelopment. It is not a stretch to say that this sensibility, seeing themselves as warriors in the battlefield of politics and ideas, is both conservative and radical at the same time. In executing the task, they became the midwives of capitalist restoration and consolidation in Indonesia after a brief flirtation with Marxist-inspired socialism.

Finally, the technocrats successfully shifted economic and political languages of their time from left-wing discourses on radical collectivities and class struggle into practical policy concerns with an emphasis on *individual rights* (in the market) and *responsibilities* (in development) in an *ordered* society. This shift was institutionalized by their educational efforts at the UI School of Economics, where they trained generations of professional economists for decades. One can call this a conservative appropriation of postcolonial socialism and Keynesianism.[10]

The radical element in the technocrats' approach was their commitment to rejuvenate society through a process of total reset. Their experience in the anti-colonial struggle emboldened their faith in their craft, vocation, and politics. Moreover, their continued adherence to the (vague notion of) Indonesian communitarian traditions and the Keynesian and quasi-socialist undertones of their economic thinking allowed them to push forward their visions during critical political junctures.

The accidental conservatives in power

When the New Order won, ousted Sukarno, and annihilated the communists, the economists were able to control the levers of power in economic policy. In the name of saving the Indonesian economy from the brink of bankruptcy, they dismantled existing socialist-populist experiments, including extensive land reform and democratization campaign in rural areas. Instead, they provided analytical and practical justifications for capitalist reforms. This included balancing the budget, rolling back the role of the state, providing space for the market and private sector, integrating Indonesia back into the global market economy, and providing subsidies as concessions for the lower-class. But make no mistake: these policies, at least up until the wave of economic liberalization in the 1980s, were not a carbon copy of Western conservatism. The technocrats retained some elements of communitarian concerns in their policies, such as addressing mass poverty and providing basic education for citizens. Their economic policies became something like the New Order consensus shared by the diverse anti-Sukarno coalition, the growing capitalist class, and the broader public.

As a result, Indonesia entered a period of rapid economic growth and stable development. However, this radical conservative experiment relied on an authoritarian mode of bourgeois politics free from the disturbance of the masses in the service of capitalist consolidation. Consequently, this experiment inadvertently became a defense for stable, boring politics. Elections and democratic procedures were a predictable façade for business-as-usual for Suharto, the New Order dictator, and his supporters and cronies. Eventually, the increasingly corrupt and repressive rule of Suharto in the later years of the New Order regime became too much to handle and therefore unacceptable, even for the technocrats. Starting from the late 1980s, critical activists and intellectuals openly challenged the New Order developmental mantra, including its economic model. The technocrats lost the very constituency that propelled them to power in the first place.

Concluding remarks

Unearthing the conservative dimensions of the technocrats' vision for modernizing Indonesia opens up new readings of economic thought in Asia and the Global South. Conventional interpretations of the technocrats typically emphasize two aspects: (1) their mastery of modern economics and appropriate policy measures, a point raised by economists; or (2) their pragmatism, as exemplified in the political scientist Rizal Mallarangeng's study.[11] Delving deeper into the biographies of the technocrats and situating their ideas and actions within Indonesia's developmental trajectory and global intellectual history help us to appreciate the value of their analytical eclecticism and its contribution to conservative economic thoughts. The continuing popularity of their ideas in policy circles and public discourses is a testament of their lasting legacy.

The Indonesian technocrats are not alone in this regard. Japanese thinkers, though inspired by neoliberal doyens, concocted their own theory of cultural neoliberalism which centers the nation, as opposed to the state, as a reservoir of pro-market culture.[12] Singaporean state builders succesfully created their own amalgamation of conservative communitarianism, combining illiberal politics, market capitalism, mass public housing, labor market flexibility, interracial harmony, and electoralism, all inspired by survivalist ethos and elements of Western social democracy.[13] In faraway Ghana, economists, sociologists, and politicians embraced the market as a tool for national liberation in the 1970s and 1980s, essentially creating an anti-colonial brand of capitalism.[14]

The *accidentally* conservative nature of the Indonesian technocrats' vision and conviction enabled their nation to move *forward*. This accelerated pathway to capitalist development, however, was achieved in a bloody manner and with a heavy price. In the end, their ambition was eclipsed by growing discontent with the New Order and a more critical assessment of the regime's failings.[15]

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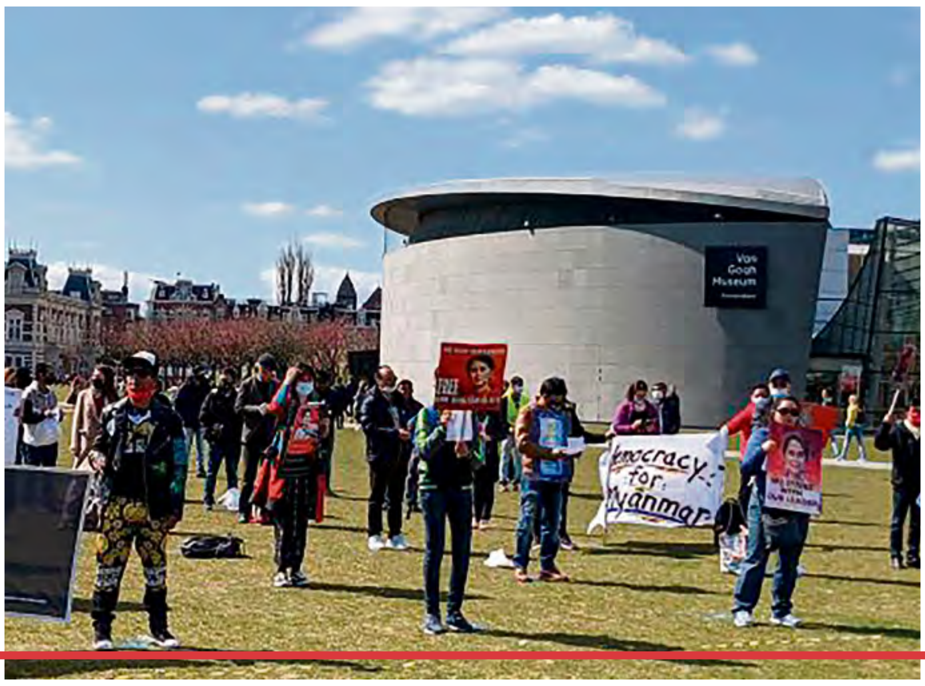


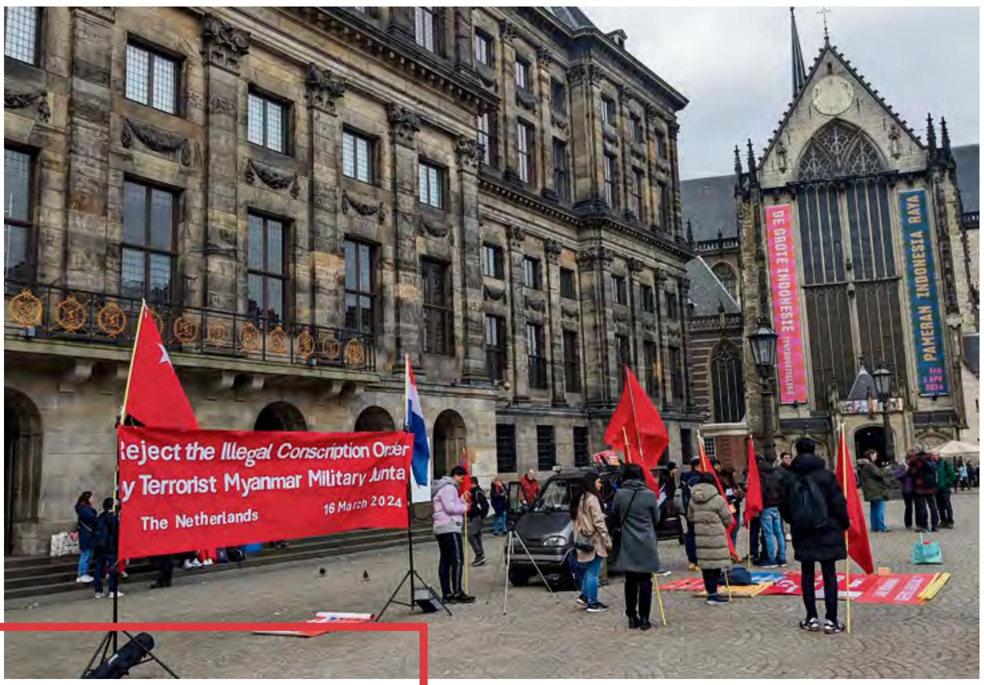

Reject the Illegal Conscription Order
by Terrorist Myanmar Military Junta
The Netherlands
16 March 2024
DE GROTE INDONESIE
PAMERAN INDONESIA RAYA

Fig. 1 (above left): Demonstration after the Myanmar military coup in Amsterdam, March 2021. (Photo by the author, 2021)

Fig. 2 (above right): Banner against military conscription during demonstration at Dam Square in Amsterdam, March 2024. (Photo by the author, 2024)

Post-coup Repression in Myanmar and Activists' Struggles for International Attention

Maaike Matelski

Myanmar activists have ample experience advocating for democracy, as the country was under formal military rule from 1962-2010. After ten years of transitioning to a quasi-democratic system, the military (which had maintained a significant political and executive presence) staged another coup on 1 February 2021. It has since violently suppressed an active and diverse opposition movement, which has stepped up both armed and unarmed resistance. How have Myanmar activists transformed themselves and sought to maintain international attention during decades of authoritarian rule? What advocacy points are brought in strategically, and how do they try to secure global support amidst other causes vying for international recognition?

As this article is written, Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) has entered its fourth year since the latest military coup of 1 February 2021. The coup, and especially the violent military response to the initially peaceful protests that followed, has caused immeasurable human and economic suffering. All of this has created a political environment that is both volatile and more repressive than before. While in previous eras activists could often outsmart the dated surveillance tactics, the military has since learnt from repressive allies to suppress the population more systematically, including online. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), recipient of the Dutch Geuzenpenning Award in 2023, over 26,000 persons have been arrested since the coup, of which a large number remain detained. According to the same source, the military has killed almost 5000 protesters and other dissidents since the coup, including 600 children; in an environment where opposition to the military is so widespread, even primary schools can become a target. In addition to these mostly extrajudicial killings, the State Administration Council (SAC), which has claimed power in Myanmar since the coup, carried out the first death penalties in decades by executing four dissidents in July 2022, including a former parliamentarian for the National League for Democracy (NLD) who was a close ally of Aung San Suu Kyi. The political opposition leader herself, who is nearly 80 years old, has remained detained since the coup and was recently sentenced to 27 years in prison.

Securing international attention

Meanwhile, activists not only have to deal with new traumas and survivor guilt, but also face a strategic challenge: how to keep the situation in Myanmar on the agenda of the international community, which is often preoccupied with conflicts closer to home or of greater geopolitical importance? In his 2005 book *The Marketing of Rebellion*, Clifford Bob speaks of a 'global morality market' where human rights activists continuously compete for attention with other worthy causes.[1] In this analysis the severity of a conflict or human rights violation only plays a small role in determining which causes gain international recognition. Other factors related to the skills, networks, and resources of activists, or the availability of a charismatic leader or spokesperson, also have a significant influence. Bob argues that a movement's 'promotional strategies' are at least as important to its impact on the international community as the content of its message. Having campaigned almost continuously for democracy over many decades, Myanmar activists have had to rephrase their message regularly in order to secure continued attention for their cause and mobilize the international community to support them.

After a large-scale public uprising was repressed in 1988 in the country then known as Burma, many activists fled abroad and continued their activities from exile. This marked the start of what came to be known as the 'Burmese democracy movement,' a loose network of organizations campaigning for democratization through various channels and tactics. Initially calling mainly for sanctions and disengagement, democracy activists over time had to reframe their message in the form of different demands, ranging from justice and accountability measures to a boycott of the military-organized elections in 2010 and various forms of investment in Myanmar. This sometimes caused friction with those operating locally inside the country, who accused activists in exile of ignoring local concerns. Yet at times these groups also worked closely together, undermining the military from inside the country while exerting international pressure through transnational platforms.

As a consequence of the global competition for international attention, activists often frame their message in the form of small, attainable goals and demands that are feasible for international actors to respond to, rather than far-reaching goals that would have a more direct impact on the situation on the ground. Prior to the coup, and especially during the early years of the so-called transition period from military dictatorship to quasi-democratic rule, groups of activists already employed different strategies to gain and maintain international attention for the situation in Myanmar. They formed what Keck and Sikkink call 'transnational advocacy networks' that use a 'boomerang pattern,' seeking to influence international actors when power holders are not susceptible to domestic pressure.[2] Internationally, they needed to frame their advocacy messages strategically to maximize political, moral, and financial support. In order to achieve this, democracy activists were often forced to simplify the situation in Myanmar by presenting clear culprits, attributions of blame, and required responses. As a consequence, the framing of situations around the aftermath of cyclone Nargis in 2008 or towards the 2010 elections was presented in ways that partially ignored changing realities on the ground.[3]

The post-2010 era saw the rise of the so-called 'Third Force,' an informal but influential network of intellectuals from Myanmar who claimed to be independent from both the military and the political opposition. This group lobbied international audiences with a message about top-down political change. The 'Third Force' organizations quickly gained popularity among Western donors and diplomats, some of whom had grown impatient with the lack of progress made by the democracy movement. They were less popular with grassroots activists, who considered them elitist, as well as with democracy activists, who accused them of supporting the military's political agenda. Western advocacy consultants who were brought in to train democracy activists presented this diversity of views and tactics as undesirable. When providing advocacy training on the 2010 elections, one noted: "Those apologists from inside the country, who think the elections will provide space, they are more consistent and more powerful in their lobbying… Oppose or support? You need to give a clear message. There is no clear message, because there are different private opinions."[4] While in a free society diverse views among civil society are more likely to be tolerated and even fostered, in cases of severe repression opposition members are often expected to present unified calls for action towards international actors.

Post-coup struggles for international legitimacy

The latest coup in February 2021 has both intensified and, in some ways, unified opposition against the military. A new generation of activists has grown up with access to social media and opportunities to vote and express their views, and the military miscalculated people's willingness to continue business-as-usual. The first weeks after the coup saw a large-scale peaceful protest movement against the military, in which student leaders, factory workers, teachers, doctors, and other civil servants united. Many women, youth, ethnic nationalities, and LGBTQ activists publicly spoke out in opposition to the military. Some also displayed solidarity with the persecuted Rohingya, a group whose plight had received more attention from outside the country than from within. Protest messages, banners, and statements were frequently written in English in an attempt to establish a global outreach. As the military increasingly turned violent on protestors, public demonstrations became more rare and ad-hoc, often taking the form of flash mobs, 'silent strikes' or protests-without-people, whereby signs or objects are put in public places and shared on social media in an attempt to reduce the direct risk to protestors. Many activists from central Myanmar relocated to border areas under the control of ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), where they received military training. Since that time, the military has faced both peaceful resistance and armed opposition from the side of the EAOs and the newly formed People's Defence Forces.

In addition to this increasingly complex resistance landscape, the post-coup revolution has also been largely leaderless, which complicates the movement's global advocacy appeal. Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been kept imprisoned since the coup, and her NLD party was eventually disbanded in 2023. A new shadow government, the National Unity Government (NUG), was formed after the coup by elected NLD politicians and leaders of a number of EAOs. Its members frequently participate in international platforms and online events in an effort to establish legitimacy, while weakening the SAC's claim to power. They have been successful in some respects, for example in the UN General Assembly, where the NLD representative from before the coup has refused to vacate Myanmar's seat and remains the country's permanent representative at the time of writing. The NUG has also convinced several Western countries to allow official NUG offices to open on their territory, and it has engaged in various forms of fundraising to support the revolution. Yet internally, the NUG and its associated body the National Unity Consultative Council reportedly lack clear leadership or strategy. They have become subject to the same criticism as activists in earlier decades, namely that they lack a coherent message towards the international community other than a rejection of the military's claim to power and recognition of the NUG as Myanmar's legitimate representative body. Moreover, critics consider the NUG insufficiently progressive when it comes to prioritizing ethnic rights and federalist claims, although it has several representatives from ethnic nationalities in its midst.

Calls for international justice

Apart from ad-hoc campaigns such as calls to support Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun as Myanmar's UN representative, activists have mainly campaigned for punitive action against the military, including criminal proceedings. In the early years of the political transition, international campaigns centred on a call for the establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry into crimes committed by the Myanmar military. While the reasons for the call were clear and in fact not new, the timing to bring this up coincided with a period when the democracy movement lost its influence in framing the 2010 elections, as international observers were eager to await the outcome of the military's top-down transition process. In September 2010, two months before the elections would take place, NLD co-founder Win Tin published an open letter in the *New York Times*, in which he commented: "I wish that our friends in Europe would abandon their dream of expecting something impossible from the election, and start taking seriously action against the regime with the aim of starting dialogue. They should begin by creating a U.N. commission of inquiry to investigate human rights violations in Burma."[5]

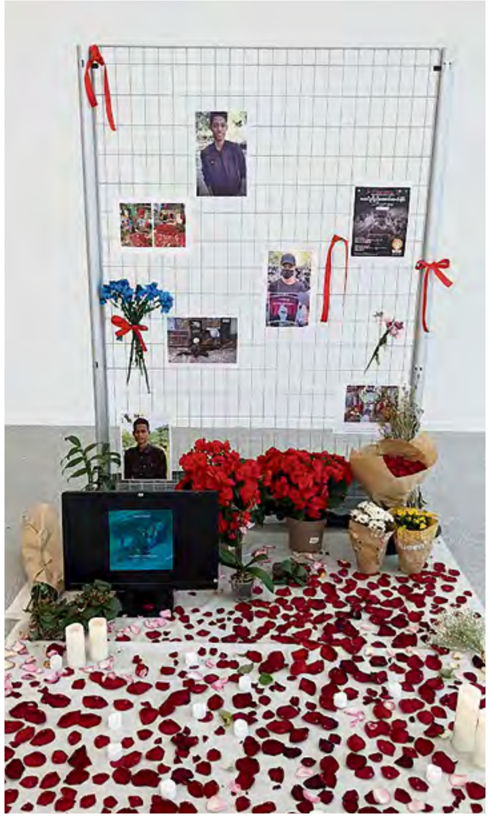
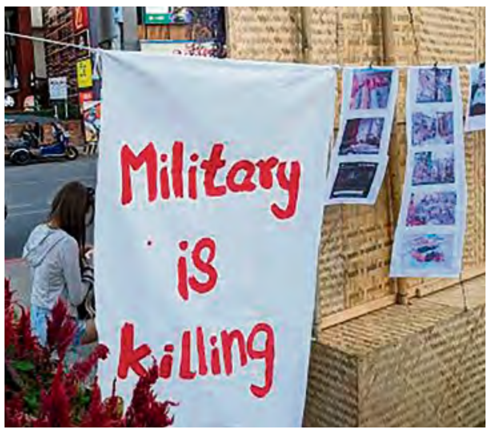


Fig. 3 (left): Memorial in Paris for victims of military violence after the Myanmar coup. Photo taken at the 12th EuroSEAS conference, June 2022. (Photo by the author, 2022)

Fig. 4 (below): Protest sign reading "Military is Killing." Photo taken in Thailand on the third commemoration of the Myanmar coup, February 2024. (Photo by the author, 2024)

Fig. 5 (bottom): Protestors in Thailand hold up the three-finger salute on the third commemoration of the Myanmar coup, February 2024. (Photo by the author, 2024)



The Commission of Inquiry campaign thus served to draw international attention back to the military's human rights violations and away from its top-down democratization process. It also provided a clear action perspective, with activists keeping track of the number of countries endorsing their campaign as a way to measure success. International actors that were more hopeful about the military's transition process, such as the conflict analysis think tank International Crisis Group, considered the Commission of Inquiry campaign unlikely to be successful, and argued that "the international community should focus its efforts on ways to support the process of reform and encourage engagement."[6] Democracy activists in private agreed that the Commission of Inquiry campaign would not be successful as long as the military remained in power, and one activist suggested that the international community needed to be kept busy with fact-finding and issuing statements.[7] This underlines the hypothesis by social movement scholars that the severity of human rights violations only partly determines why certain campaigns are set up at a particular point in time; strategic considerations also play a decisive role.

International messaging since the 2021 coup

In the more than three years since the latest coup, activists again have had to adapt their calls to the international community's receptiveness. Only in initial months after the coup did they try to invoke the Responsibility to Protect in an effort to seek direct armed intervention in Myanmar. Yet international responses remained limited to statements, even after the military started killing a significant number of people, shooting at protestors, and bombing presumed hotbeds of resistance. Consequently, activists' messaging to the international community became more cynical. When the UN Secretary General issued a statement condemning the execution of four dissidents in July 2022, a Kachin activist wrote on Twitter: "We stand in solidarity with the UN for feeling sorry for us. Take your time … we still have millions of people still alive."[8] Despite widespread resistance to the military, activists came to the realization that no international actors would come to their aid. In fact, they again had to struggle to keep their plight on the international advocacy agendas. Since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, attention for Myanmar's resistance had been waning. This was exacerbated the following year, when Europe became preoccupied with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Demonstrations in Iran around the same time initially caught international attention, with women publicly cutting their hair in support of female protestors. Compared to these causes, Myanmar lacked geopolitical relevance, a prominent leader such as President Zelensky in Ukraine, or an easily identifiable group of victims; military violence since the coup has been almost indiscriminately against all sections of the population, not only women or particular minority groups. Aung San Suu Kyi already lost much of her international reputation after having been held internationally responsible for the violence against the Rohingya, which she attempted to defend at the International Court of Justice in 2019 – in fact, the violence was orchestrated by Min Aung Hlaing, the same military leader responsible for the 2021 coup. Unlike in previous eras, Aung San Suu Kyi has been held largely incommunicado since the coup, and no opposition leader has been able to take over her symbolic role.

Activists inside and outside Myanmar continue to come up with new advocacy agendas: a 'blood money campaign' to boycott companies affiliated with the military, calls for a ban on aviation fuel (only the military has airpower in Myanmar), and attempts to redirect humanitarian aid away from the military and its affiliated organizations such as the Myanmar Red Cross. These campaigns bring to mind debates about economic sanctions and humanitarian aid in previous eras. Again, they are phrased as goals that are relatively easy for international actors to act on, although they have thus far been only moderately successful. The real needs in Myanmar, as earlier, lie in a permanent removal of the military from all positions of power, an immediate end to the violence against dissidents and internally displaced persons, and large-scale assistance in almost every field, from urgent humanitarian aid to long-term economic and educational support. Additionally, new generations of activists call for a federal democratic system in which the rights of ethnic nationalities and other minorities are fully and permanently acknowledged. Needless to say, such long-term ambitions can only be established by forces inside the country, yet they require consistent support and recognition from international allies.

In March 2024, I witnessed a demonstration on Dam Square in Amsterdam, where the Myanmar community displayed banners calling for rejection of the military conscription order [Fig. 2]. The conscription order is a newly enforced law by which every citizen under the age of 35 – with different age limits for women and certain professional groups –has become vulnerable to forced conscription by the military, or else face large fines to avoid this. While this law has undeniably had a significant impact on Myanmar's youth, it was not immediately clear from the demonstration how the Dutch audience is expected to act in response to this information. More encouraging, perhaps, would be expressions of solidarity by activists campaigning for human rights in Gaza, Iran, and elsewhere, some of whom had gathered on the same square at the same time. In previous eras, activists campaigning for Myanmar gained attention by teaming up with Tibet support groups and other like-minded causes. Similar displays of cross-cause solidarity could be established after the latest coup, whereby activists globally join forces instead of competing for attention in the inevitable 'global morality market'.

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Notes

[1] Bob, C. (2005). *The marketing of rebellion: Insurgents, media, and international activism.* Cambridge University Press.
[2] Keck, M. E., & Sikkink, K. (1998). *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics.* Cornell University Press.
[3] Matelski, M. (2024). *Contested Civil Society in Myanmar: Local Change and Global Recognition.* Bristol University Press.
[4] Personal observation cited in Matelski 2024, p.110
[5] Win Tin (2010) 'An election not worthy of support', *The New York Times*, 30 September, Available from: https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/01/opinion/01iht-eduwintin.html
[6] International Crisis Group (2011) 'Myanmar: major reform underway', Jakarta/ Brussels: International Crisis Group.
[7] Matelski 2024, p. 115
[8] Tweet by @FreeKachin dated 26 July 2022. Available from: https://twitter.com/FreeKachin/status/1551750179811987458

8th Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network

Negotiating Asian Borders: Actors, Displacements, Multiplicities, Sovereignties

Yarmouk University, Jordan
2-4 September 2025

Call for Papers

Deadline: 1 November 2024

Above:
Umm Qais, Jordan. (Photo by Ruba Al Akash, Director of Refugee Displaced Persons and Forced Migration Studies Centre Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan)

Call for Papers

The multiple crises facing our world today warrant critical reflection on how we think of bordering, sovereignty, belonging, and solidarity. Today, borders are transforming in multiple ways as communities, technologies, infrastructures, and natural forces interact, blending physical and virtual boundaries together. Borders are negotiated through new practices, on the ground and “in the cloud”, with profound implications on our understanding of actors, displacements, multiplicities, and sovereignties. The tactics people use to navigate contemporary borders, the historical linkages and narratives of borders, and alternative visions of borders and borderlands are all important parts of these transformations. How people navigate and make sense of these turbulent times remains a key question to be answered. Tracing historical linkages and dynamics can unveil diverse narratives on borders and sovereignty, inviting voices, memories, and imaginaries towards alternative visions of the present and future.

The theme of the 8th ABRN conference is “Negotiating Asian Borders.” The four sub-themes – Actors, Displacements, Multiplicities, Sovereignties – offer specific points of engagement, with broader possibilities of cross-fertilisation of ideas and research directions. For a more detailed description of conference themes, visit https://www.iias.asia/events/negotiating-asian-borders.

We invite conceptually innovative papers, based on fresh research, in order to develop new perspectives in the study of borderlands in Asia and its broader geographical reach, especially connections to other world regions and continents. Submissions are invited from scholars, writers, policy studies researchers, artists, filmmakers, activists, and journalists, among others.

Only a small number of individual papers will be selected. We therefore encourage you to submit a full panel proposal. We will consider proposals for panels and roundtables that have a thematic focus, are of a comparative character, and involve scholars or practitioners affiliated with different institutions.

The deadline to send in panel, roundtable, and paper proposals is 1 November 2024.

Please visit https://www.iias.asia/events/negotiating-asian-borders to submit proposals. Participants will be notified in March 2025.

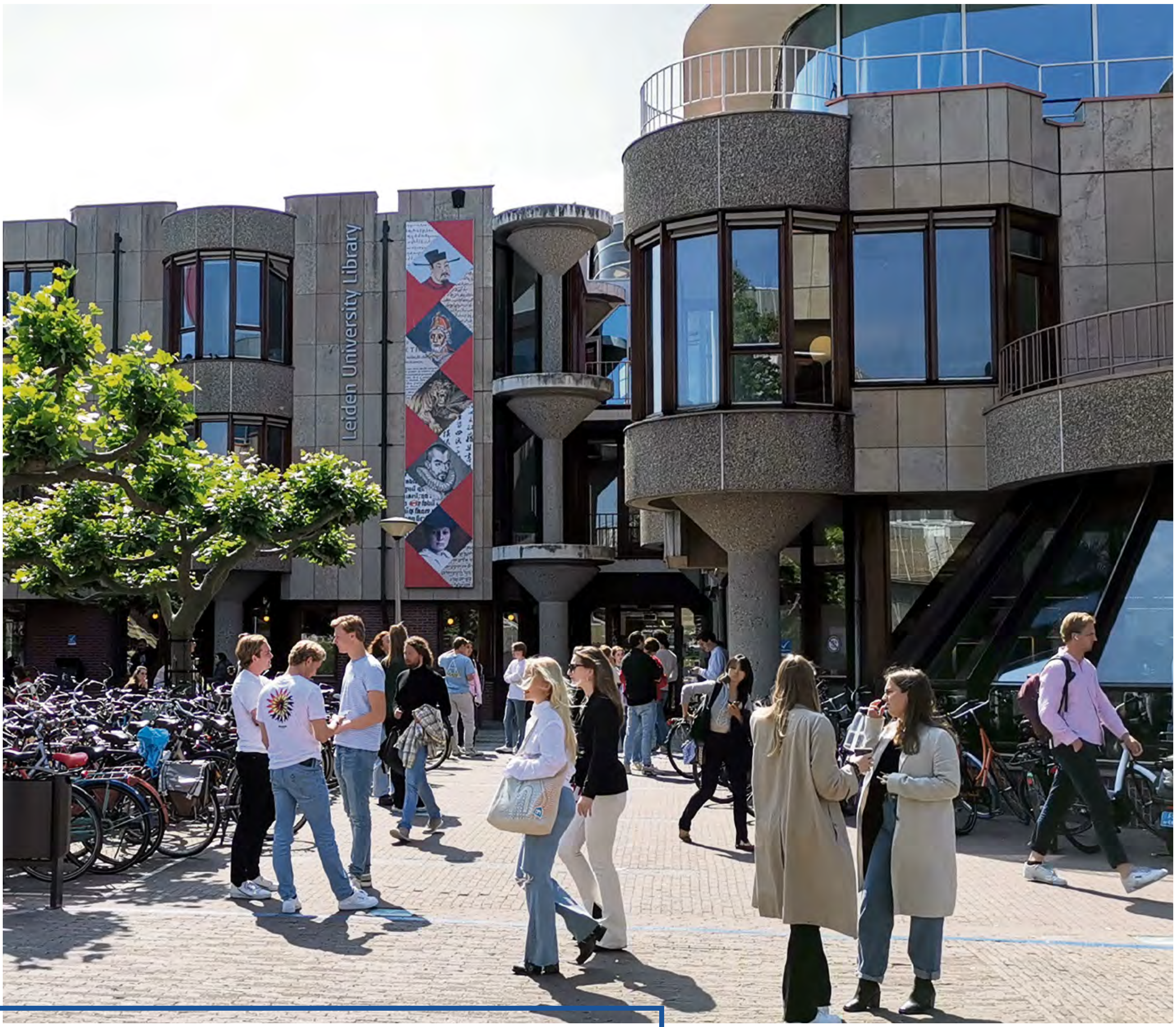

Fig. 1: The Leiden University Library building. (Photo courtesy of Leiden University Library, 2023)

The Indonesian Collection at the Leiden University Library

Marije Plomp

The Leiden University Library (UBL), home to one of the world's most significant collections on Indonesia, stands as a vital resource for anyone delving into the historical, cultural, and social dynamics of Indonesia. As such it forms the counterpart to the collections kept at the National Library of Indonesia in Jakarta and other heritage institutions in Indonesia.

The collection

The extensive Indonesian collection of UBL, known for its depth and breadth, traces its origins to the period of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia. During this time, numerous documents, maps, and manuscripts were gathered by colonial administrators, scholars, bible translators, and the military. The collection was significantly expanded in 2012 and 2014, with, respectively, materials from the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) and the world-renowned collection of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV).

The Indonesian collection is remarkable not only for the breadth of its time span,[1] but also for its diversity. It includes various types of sources, spanning most disciplines and covering a wide range of topics in the humanities. It includes not only indigenous materials and narratives, but also documents relating to the administration of the Dutch East Indies colonial government, providing a record of governance and interaction with local communities. The collection is further enriched by the extensive scholarly output of both Western and Indonesian scholars, produced from the colonial period to the present day. The Jakarta branch of the UBL (KITLV-Jakarta, located on the grounds of the Dutch Embassy) acquires approximately 4500 modern Indonesian titles for the UBL each year.[2] Together, these sources provide invaluable insights into the socio-political and economic changes that have shaped modern Indonesia.

For Indonesians, engaging with these materials is not only an academic exercise but a journey towards understanding the roots and routes of Indonesian cultural and historical identity. The indigenous materials are valuable sources that help to reconstruct national history from a local perspective. Moreover, documents such manuscripts, travel reports, newspapers, and ethnographic studies serve as a bridge connecting current and past generations, facilitating a deeper appreciation and understanding of Indonesia's rich heritage and complex history.

Digital collections

Access to sources related to Indonesia extends beyond the physical confines of the library through UBL's extensive Digital Collections.[3] With a commitment to accessibility and scholarly engagement, the library ensures that researchers worldwide can delve into the rich repository of Indonesian materials from the comfort of their own screens. Through the Digital Collections, users have access to, among other collections, 150,000 digitized photographs, 30,000 maps, and archival collections such as Kartini's letters, rubbings of Javanese inscriptions, the Snouck Hurgronje papers, and a jukebox filled with popular Indonesian music from the 20th century. One of the latest additions consists of Indonesian newspapers and magazines from the period of World War II and the Revolution.[4]

A feast to the eye is found in the collection of 18th-century Malay letters from the sultans from Palembang, Jambi, and Siak. They are written on beautifully decorated gold printed paper and adorned with elegant calligraphy and royal seals. For those interested in learning about agricultural production in the extractive colonial economy or the renowned botanical gardens in Bogor, the 90 serials and 2500 colonial publications previously owned by KIT will provide valuable insights. And last but not least, the Digital Collections present four grand texts from Indonesia that have been inscribed in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register: the La Galigo epic poem (Sulawesi), the Chronicles of Diponegoro (Java), the *Hikayat Aceh*, and stories on the legendary Prince Panji (Java and Bali).

In addition to the Digital Collections, other digitised sources can be accessed via the online catalogue. For example, KITLV's digital documents include many frequently consulted works such as *Adatrechtbundels*, *Handelingen van den Volksraad*, and *De Indische Gids*. More recent printed material is also available online, such as reports and other publications by international and Indonesian NGOs and government agencies.

Continued overleaf

In addition, Google Books has digitised 500 of the library's rare early printed publications in Malay, Batak, Sundanese, and Javanese.[5] Although the number of sources available online is large and continuously growing, it is still only a part of the total collection. This year, UBL has committed to increasing its digitisation efforts. Projects are underway to scan Batak and Palembang manuscripts and larger print collections.

The level of access to digitised sources varies, depending on copyright and data protection regulations. For example, some sources can only be accessed on computers in the library building.

The physical collections can be accessed by visiting the library in person. To use these resources, visitors need to register for a library card upon arrival. It is recommended to check the library's website for current visitor policies, opening hours, and any requirements for accessing specific materials, as some may need prior reservation or additional permissions due to their rarity or sensitivity. If you are planning to visit Leiden for a longer period of time, it is advisable to book your accommodation as early as possible, as supply is limited.

Research support services

UBL offers various research support services to assist users in navigating and utilising its collections. This includes reference services where librarians can guide users to relevant materials, as well as specialized support for those seeking to work with archival documents or manuscripts. The library provides digital tools to help users find specific items within its collections. The main portal is the online library catalogue. An online tutorial that familiarizes first-time visitors with the catalogue is found on the UBL website. For archival material a second search tool, Collections Guides,[6] offers a full-text search in the archive inventories, thereby significantly enriching the search results. If you are looking for manuscripts, consulting older print catalogues and *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden* is advisable, besides searching in the online catalogue. You can access the print catalogues in Digital Collections, UBL Library Catalogues.[7]

Scanning machines are available for visitors to make digital images of microfilms, documents, and publications. Scans of fragile items such as manuscripts and historical newspapers can be requested by completing the digitisation request form on the UBL website.[8] The website also provides information on visiting the library and using the collections, as well as contact details for South and Southeast Asia Curator Doris Jedamski, South and Southeast Asia Photography Curator Anouk Mansfeld, and Southeast Asia Subject Librarian Marije Plomp. If you have any questions about the collections or library services, you can use the 'Ask a Librarian' button on the home page.

Fellowships

The library's Scaliger Institute[9] offers a range of fellowship programs. The Lingling Wiyadharma Fellowship offers the opportunity to three scholars to spend up to three months conducting research using the Southeast Asian and particularly the Indonesian Special Collections at the Leiden University Library. Other fellowships of interest to researchers working with Indonesian materials include the Drewes Fellowship, Van de Sande Fellowship, Brill Fellowship, and Elsevier Fellowship for Digital Scholarship. Information on terms, conditions, and application procedures are available on the library's website.[10] Below, two former Lingling Wiydharma fellows from 2023, Muhammad Haidar Izzudin and Mohammad Refi Omar Ar Razy, share their experiences doing research in UBL's collections.

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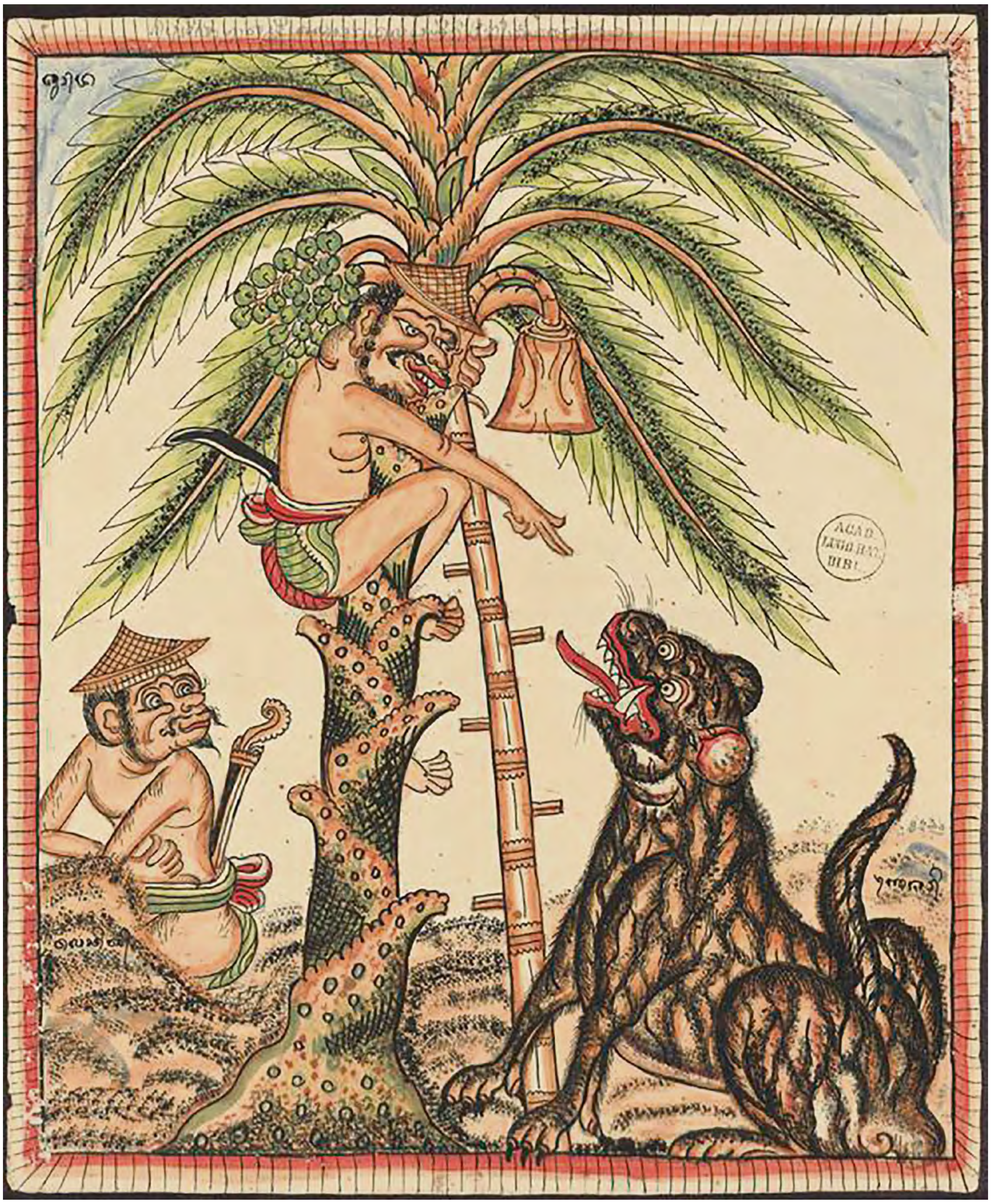

Fig. 2: Balinese drawing by I Madé Tlaga, depicting Surada, the palm wine maker, sitting in a tree. He annoys a tiger while another man, called Walacit, watches the scene. Nineteenth Century. UBL, Or. 3390: 182.

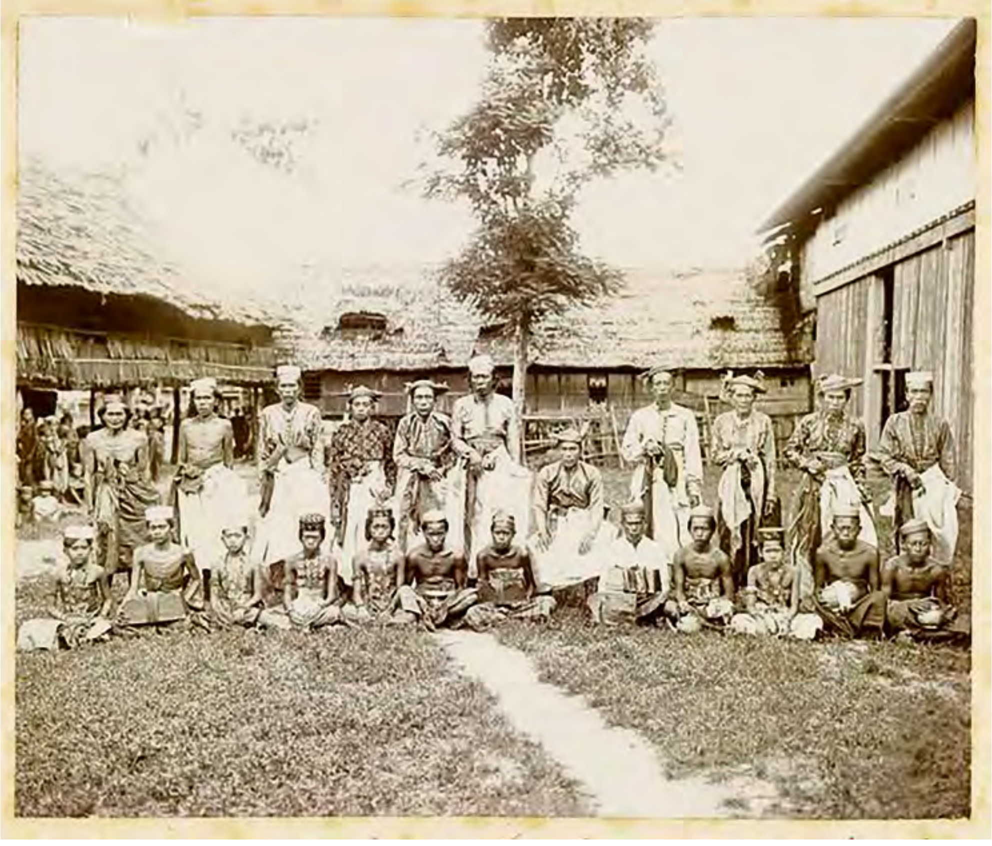

Fig. 3: Local heads with their servants, South Sulawesi, circa 1910. UBL, KITLV 31010.

Notes

[1] This span ranges from a 9th-century AD Old Javanese inscription to the latest publications in a variety of languages from and about Indonesia. However, the main part of the colonial collection consists of material from the mid-19th century AD until the mid-20th century AD.

[2] In addition, the Jakarta branche office acquires 700 to 800 modern titles annually from Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei

[3] https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl.

[4] This digital collection was donated by NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam. https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/collection/niod.

[5] Searching for "Google Book-collectie" in the online catalogue with the use of the catalogue's language filter will bring up these titles. https://catalogue.leidenuniv.nl.

[6] https://collectionguides.universiteitleiden.nl.

[7] https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/librarycatalogues.

[8] Information on the ordering process and costs is available on the website.

[9] https://www.library.universiteitleiden.nl/special-collections/scaliger-institute.

[10] https://www.library.universiteitleiden.nl/special-collections/fellowships.

Ulu Manuscripts at the Leiden University Library

Muhammad Haidar Izzuddin

In my quest to unravel the rich cultural tapestry of Sumatra, I have had the privilege of exploring the manuscript collection of UBL. With the generous support of the Lingling Wiyadharma Fellowship of the library's Scaliger Institute, I was able to study the Ulu manuscripts, handwritten books from the highland communities of southern Sumatra.

The manuscripts

The library has an extensive and varied collection of Ulu manuscripts, covering a wide range of materials and textual genres. This collection also includes transliterations and copies of Ulu manuscripts from various institutions, providing a comprehensive resource for students and scholars alike. The Ulu manuscript collection of UBL consists of 136 manuscripts: 36 bamboo manuscripts, one bark manuscript, and 99 paper manuscripts. This is a substantial collection of manuscripts, especially when compared to the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, which has only 40 Ulu manuscripts.

The bamboo manuscripts include bamboo strips/*gelumpai* (bamboo strips held together with string) and bamboo stem/*surat boloh* (bamboo manuscripts with one or more internodes). *Kaghas* manuscripts are made of tree bark folded into a leporello shape. Paper manuscripts include sheets of paper, books, and leporellos with handwritten texts in Ulu script. From my observations, the Ulu manuscripts of UBL are well cared for and preserved. They are stored in specially designed boxes and folders. Moreover, depending on the type of manuscript, the staff hand out gloves before you handle the manuscripts.

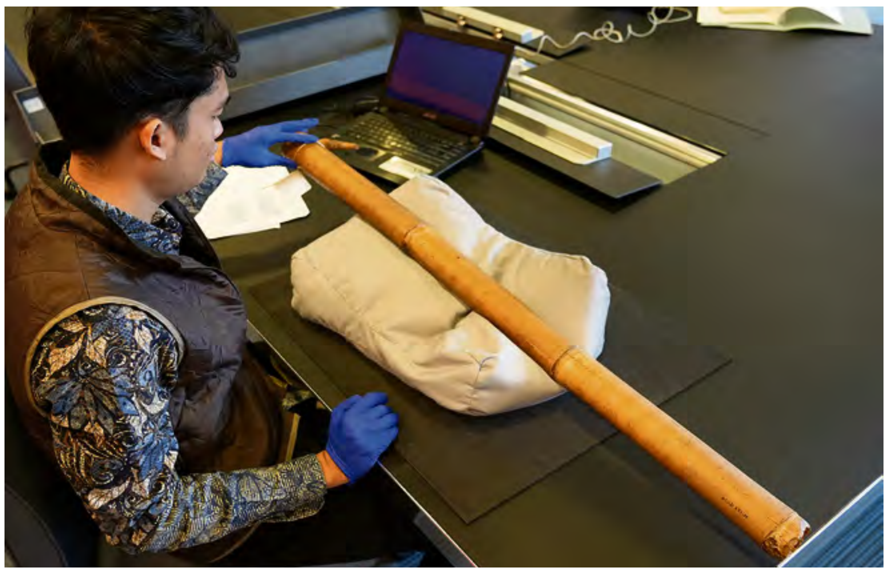

Fig. 1. *Gelumpai* manuscript containing questions and answers about the *Jajuna* bird, life and nature, and a receipt for a buffalo purchased from a village chief. UBL, Or. 12.281.

Collection history

The origins of the Ulu manuscript collections at UBL trace back to the late 19th to mid-20th century AD. The acquisition of these manuscripts stemmed from various donations, with the initial collection efforts attributed to the linguist H.N. van der Tuuk in the 1880s. His contributions, including copies and transliterations archived under the shelfmarks Or. 3263 and Or. 3387, likely entered the library around mid-1896. Subsequent donations from individuals such as G.K. Niemann in the early 1900s, L.C. Westenenk in 1934 and 1935, M.G. Emeis, W.F. Lublink Weddik, and E.M. Uhlenbeck further enriched the collection. Another collection of bamboo manuscripts, notable for its size, was posthumously donated by J.A.W. van Ophuijsen (Or. 12.242 – Or. 12.263). Additionally, the collaborative efforts of M.A. Jaspan and P. Voorhoeve since 1969 have significantly contributed to the collection's expansion and preservation.

Enriching metadata

In my search for the Ulu manuscripts in the library's collections, I took a multi-pronged approach. First, I used the online catalogue. Using keywords, titles, and subject headings, I was able to identify some relevant material. However, the metadata and manuscript descriptions provided by UBL, particularly for the Ulu manuscripts, proved to be rather limited. Fortunately, I was able to use older printed catalogues such as the one compiled by Iskandar (1999) and Witkam's *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden* (2007) to locate all Ulu manuscripts.

My work in identifying and describing these manuscripts will result in a catalogue. I hope that the metadata I create and share with the library will make it easier for future users to identify Ulu manuscripts in the collection. This, in turn, could encourage the use and study of this important cultural heritage of South Sumatra.

Tips for exploring the manuscript collection of UBL

For those who would like to explore the manuscript collection of UBL, I offer the following tips:

1. Familiarize yourself with the library's online catalog and database to search for relevant manuscripts and materials related to your research interests.
2. Utilize keywords, titles, and subject headings to narrow down your search and identify material that align with your research objectives.
3. Take advantage of the library's digitization efforts to access rare and fragile manuscripts online, allowing for a more convenient and comprehensive study of the texts.
4. Make use of the metadata and manuscript descriptions provided by the online and digitized catalogues to gain insights into the manuscripts' provenance, content, and thematic significance.
5. Consider reaching out to the library staff and experts in Indonesian Studies for guidance and assistance in navigating the Ulu manuscript collection effectively.

Muhammad Haidar Izzuddin is an independent researcher from Palembang, Indonesia. In 2023, he was recipient of the Lingling Wiyadharma Fellowship of the Scaliger Institute, Leiden University Libraries.
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Finding Traces of Hoesein Djajadiningrat at the Leiden University Library

Mohammad Refi Omar Ar Razy

The purpose of my research at the Leiden University Library was to collect additional sources for my doctoral thesis. My research aims to explore knowledge production, knowledge transmission, and intellectual networks through a case study of Hoesein Djajadiningrat.[1] Hoesein was born on 8 December 1886 in Kramatwatu, Banten. In 1904, he went to the Netherlands to study at the Department of Oriental Literature at the Leiden University. There he was taught directly by Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, the renowned Islamologist and Arabist. He graduated seven years later, becoming the first Indonesian to receive a doctorate, with a dissertation entitled *Critische Beschouwing van Sadjarah Banten* (1913). He published on a wide range of topics related to history, Islamic studies, and literature, and he became an important figure in both Dutch and Indonesian social and academic circles.

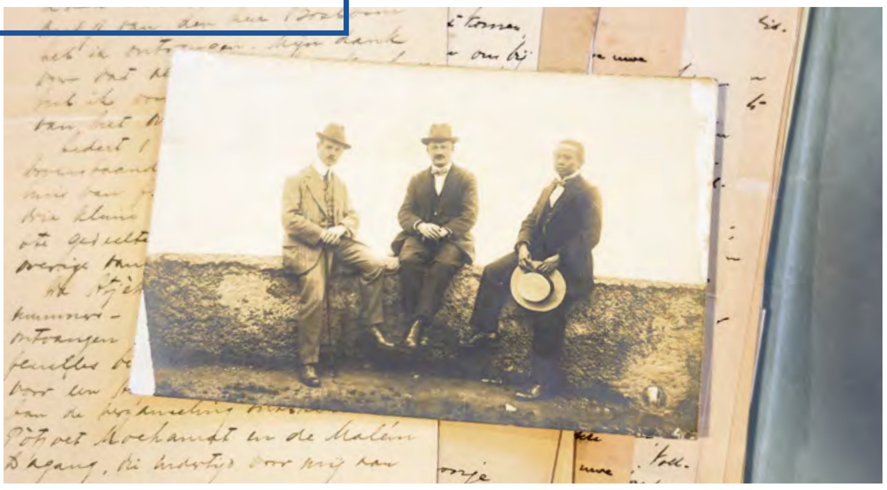

Fig. 1. Letters by Hoesein and Snouck Hurgronje. Hoesein enclosed a picture of himself and two of his friends in Switzerland in a letter to his former professor. He visited the country on his return journey to Indonesia. UBL, DH 1105 folder 1.

In search of relevant sources for my research, I visited several Indonesian libraries and archives, including the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, the Library of the Republic of Indonesia, the Rekso Pustoko Library, and the Sonobudoyo Library. I found many of Hoesein's works from after his return to the Dutch East Indies, including his contributions about Java. In the Rekso Pustoko Library, I was able to access his correspondence with Mangkoenagoro VII of Surakarta and his wife Partini. Most of these letters discuss the promotion of Javanese culture through the Java Instituut. However, much of Hoesein's correspondence with his former teachers in Leiden is held in the Leiden University Library. From 1912 to 1935, Hoesein exchanged letters with his supervisor Snouck Hurgronje. With a total of 81 letters between them (shelfmark D H 1105, folders 1 and 2), their correspondence shows how the relationship between supervisor and student continued after Hoesein's return to the Dutch East Indies.

The bulk of their correspondence concerns the *Atjèhsch-Nederlandsch woordenboek* ("Acehnese-Dutch dictionary", 1934), which Hoesein worked on after his return. In 1914-1915, he travelled to the Koetaraja area of Aceh, now Banda Aceh, to learn the Acehnese language. He was accompanied by two local informants, Tengkoe Noerdin and Hadji Aboebakar. The informants helped him by explaining grammar, suggesting words for the dictionary, and collecting relevant data. Tengkoe Noerdin and Hadji Aboebakar also copied manuscripts of Acehnese *hikayat* ("story", a narrative genre in Malay and Acehnese textual traditions). that they came across during their travels.[2] Some of these are now in the UBL Special Collections, including *Hikayat Atjeh*, *Hikayat Prang Sabi* and *Hikayat Peulandok Kence*. Most of the entries in the dictionary were derived from the language of the *hikayat*, which differs from spoken language in sentence structure and word usage. By examining a large number of *hikayat*, Hoesein was able to study how the words were used and thereby discover their meaning.

In addition to Hoesein's letters to Snouck Hurgronje, the library also holds letters from Hoesein to other intellectuals such as R.A. Kern, F.S. Eringa, and Salim Al-Attas. Overall, the library has an extensive collection of materials relating to Hoesein and other important figures in Indonesia, making it a vital resource for my research. The collection contains a wealth of materials resulting from the direct or indirect interaction between Indonesia and the Netherlands, all of which are well preserved. This collection has allowed me to discover important pieces that complement the resources I already have. I believe it would be beneficial for Indonesian researchers with similar interests to explore the collection. Given its importance, I highly recommend that any Indonesian researcher visit Leiden University Library, whether for a short or longer stay, to take advantage of this valuable resource.

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Notes

[1] A biography of Hoessein is currently being written by Marieke Bloembergen (KITLV) and Tom van den Berge.

[2] Kees Groeneboer, "Herman Neubronner Van der Tuuk and Nineteenh-Century Language Study in Southeast Asia," *Kekal Abadi*, 2002, 21(2); C.D. Grijns, "Van der Tuuk and the study of Malay," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 1996, 152(3), 353-381; Andries Teeuw, "Van der Tuuk as Lexicographer,", *Archipel*, 1996, 51(1), 113-133.

From the IIAS Fellowship Coordinator

Laura Erber

The Fellowship Programme at the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is so much more than just another funding source for individual research projects in the humanities and social sciences. It is a vibrant platform that fosters scholarly exchange, challenging fellows to question conventional area studies and disciplinary boundaries in our ever-evolving global academic landscape.

The IIAS Fellowship Programme is designed to be an inspiring environment that nurtures academic growth within a supportive and friendly framework. Bringing scholars together in Leiden to advance their research is about so much more than just providing them with the necessary conditions to refine and amplify their work. It's about exposing them to the Institute's entire knowledge ecosystem—its networks, partners, programmes, activities, actions, and ideas. A key focus of the programme is to generate and facilitate meaningful discussions that tackle the pressing issues researchers face, recognising the increasing number of scholars who encounter various barriers in their academic pursuits.

Beginning this year, our fellowship will shift to a 12-month format, with all fellows arriving in September to create a cohesive and interactive cohort. We want prospective applicants to see a fellowship at IIAS as more than a place to churn out research for publication, but, as we envision it, as fertile ground for cultivating new ideas, enriched by an enlightening exchange of life experiences and thought-provoking interactions.

In the next few years, our programme activities will pivot around two main reflective themes. The first focuses on spaces of knowledge production explored through film sessions that address life on campuses, projects of heterodox higher education institutions, and intersections between society and academia. The second theme tackles the structure of residential fellowships and their impact on knowledge production. This kind of meta-reflection contributes to a better understanding of the systems in which the fellows themselves are inserted and how to navigate them.

Within the rapidly changing academic job landscape, in which the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts are often being assessed with technocratic tools, the very nature of the academic career is undergoing major transformations. As researchers develop their research, they continue to reflect on their professional identity, the limits of their own fields and potential directions for their future work. Lately, we have been seeing a growing number of researchers who, for various reasons, have had to leave their field of study, do not have access to essential field research sites, or face substantial challenges in connecting academic research to other forms of knowledge production.

We believe these are highly relevant issues and that they can generate significant conversations and constructive debates among our fellows. By fostering meaningful encounters, the programme aims to go beyond the traditional residency programme models, which focus on isolation and individual career development, and instead become a space for conversational and collaborative growth.

Laura Erber
Coordinator, IIAS Fellowship Programme

IIAS Fellowship Options

Would you like to join the IIAS researchers' community? Apply for one of our fellowship modalities:

IIAS Fellowship for Post-Doctoral Researchers
We invite preferably young or mid-career researchers in the Social Sciences and Humanities, to apply for a 12-month fellowship

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 applying for an additional one to three months of residency at the Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme (FMSH) in Paris, France.

Gonda-IIAS Fellowship
Promising young Indologists at the post-doctorate level can 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.

IIAS Collaborative Fellowship
This short-term residential fellowship is designed to embrace a broad spectrum of researchers and practitioners, encompassing not only academics but also artists, curators, librarians and editors. The programme is dedicated to transforming practices in knowledge production through active collaboration with IIAS.

Professorial Fellowship for the Chair of Taiwan Studies at Leiden University and IIAS
Are you a dedicated researcher and teacher who specialises in Taiwan Studies? You are welcome to apply for this professorship position, available for either five or ten months.

Information and application:
www.iias.asia/fellowships

A City in the Colonial Margins

Taylor M. Easum

I am happy to have published my book, Chiang Mai between Empire and Nation: A City in the Colonial Margins, with Amsterdam University Press as part of the IIAS Asian Cities series. I can think of no better place for this book, given its focus on the urban and spatial history of Chiang Mai, an Asian city that illuminates broad questions of global colonialism and Thai political history. This project is the result of a longstanding interest in urban history, sacred space, and regional identity that began with my first trip outside my home country, and continued through my dissertation at UW-Madison. Once I returned to the project several years ago, I benefitted greatly from the help and encouragement of several editors and staff at IIAS and AUP, as well as the two anonymous reviewers who provided helpful and encouraging feedback. I am extremely grateful for all their support throughout the process.

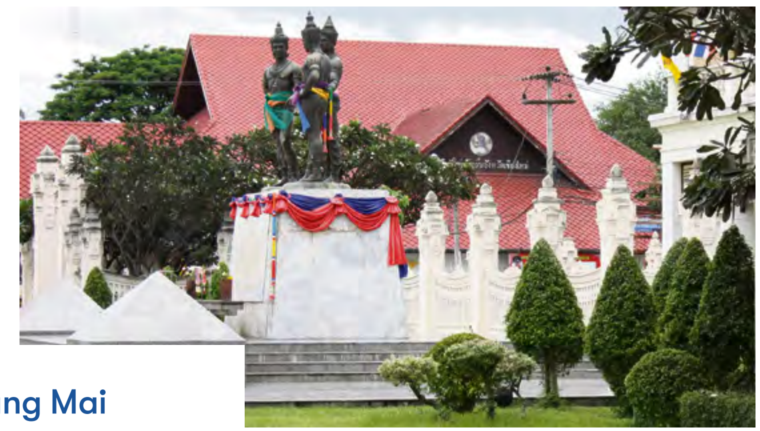

Fig. 1: Three Kings Monument with 'Chiang Mai Arts and Culture Center' to the right, and a 'Local Museum' behind, located across the street in a once abandoned monastery. (Photo by Taylor M. Easum, 2013)

The idea for this book began, in a sense, simply by wandering the streets of Chiang Mai as a study abroad student, asking myself questions about the colonial-era architecture, ruined walls and temples, and other remnants of the past that seemed to poke through the modern, trendy, and heavily touristic present of the city. Why were there Christian churches on one side of the river? Why were there so many abandoned *chedi* in the city center? Why was there an abandoned temple, a colonial-style office, and a prison all in the same spot? By the time I was ready to propose my dissertation topic in Southeast Asian history, I returned to this curiosity knowing that it had the potential to answer many of the questions that were important to both scholars and local communities in Chiang Mai. How can we make sense of the historical relationship between Siam and colonialism? Why is urban development in Thailand so Bangkok-centric? What political power does regional or local identity have in heavily centralized Thailand?

Chiang Mai was a perfect example of what drew me to the city as an exchange student – it wasn't the capital, or the largest city, but it wasn't a small town either. Call it what you will – intermediate, secondary, or regional – but cities between the megalopolis and the town were both neglected in much of the scholarship on Asia, and the site of much of the urbanization that was transforming the region. Moreover, as a student of modern Thai history, I began to see Chiang Mai as a fascinating intersection between colonial and national forces, between Siamese kings, British diplomats, and American missionaries. I could detect the outlines of this even during my first visit, with the remnants of the teak trade, Presbyterian churches, and imposing colonial-style buildings located in the sacred center of the city, but the importance of the city as a fulcrum between an early modern *mandala* empire and a modern nation-state became clear as I researched the spatial footprint of power and administration in the city.

The future of the urban past?

During my time in Chiang Mai, I saw this historical heritage become a subject of debate and contestation. Who had the power to determine the meaning of urban space during a time of political upheaval and conflict? This was clear in the efforts to build museums in the city center meant to reinterpret the heart of the city. When I first explored the city center there was the famous Three Kings Monument dedicated to the thirteenth century founders of the city, a new Arts and Culture Center occupying the old Provincial Office, and the ruins of a temple closely connected with the sacred foundations of the city before Bangkok's dominance.[1] The temple, once ignored by the central state, with a road cut through its middle, served merely as an exemplar of local architecture from the main museum, but they soon built their own local museum on the newly revived grounds of the temple [Fig. 1]. Across another street, the imposing courthouse became the Lanna Folklife Museum, showcasing local culture and folk arts.

Perhaps most dramatically, I saw protests engulf the regional archaeology department as they excavated the northern city gate – an auspicious location according to the spatial logic of the city – as pro-Thaksin forces accused the government archaeologists of performing some sort of 'black magic' to curse the exiled former prime minister. Urban space was far from the stage on which politics and history would unfold; in this case, urban space was what brought politics, magic, and archaeology into the light.

The right to the city

The future development of Chiang Mai, and the fate of the remains of the past, remain a critical issue for residents of the city today. Over my years researching in Chiang Mai, this has been a constant. During my initial research, there were protests against schemes to expand and widen roads in and around the city, which would increase traffic, impact safety, and potentially damage local streetscapes. In 2015 Chiang Mai was put on the tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage Status,[2] partly in response to the challenges of overdevelopment and tourism facing the city. Various groups lay claim to the historical and sacred spaces of the city, including the provincial and central government offices, local scholars and activists, professional archaeologists of the Fine Arts Department, and *Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep*, a Buddhist reliquary and pilgrimage destination that has revived several formerly abandoned sites across the city.

For the local community, the main struggle has been to preserve, define, and make accessible the urban heritage of the city. But there are tensions inherent in this. In 2017, while attending the 10th International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 10) and the 13th International Conference on Thai Studies (ICTS 13), both in Chiang Mai, I presented the research this book is based on, and also attended several panels having to do with the city's recent application for World Heritage status. Some panels advocated this new status as a way to protect overdeveloped sites from rampant tourism; still others advocated for UNESCO status as a way to promote tourism in the province. In other words, should we protect historic sites from tourists, or use them to draw tourists in? At that same conference, I joined a large group of scholars to support a declaration calling for the return of academic freedom, rights and civil liberties in the wake of the 2014 coup;[3] the power of Bangkok continues to loom large in provincial Thailand.

As the book explores the complex relationship between the central state and the local urbanism of Chiang Mai, recent events have shown how this dynamic continues to shape urban life and politics in the city. For example, in 2018, protests erupted in downtown Chiang Mai over a housing development for judges that cut into the foothills of *Doi Suthep*, the mountain west of the city that figures so prominently into the sacred landscape of the city.[4] It was a rare expression of discontent aimed at the military government, but crucially one that was grounded in a sense of the meaning and power of urban and sacred space in Chiang Mai.

Now that my book is complete, I am working on several new projects. First, I am developing a collaborative project on the history of games, gaming, and play in Asia. Second, I am also pursuing a translation of this book into Thai, with the hope of making it more available to local readers. Finally, I am continuing my research into Thai urban history by examining the post-World War II legacy of the late 19th- to early 20th-century urban transformation of cities like Chiang Mai. I plan to return to Thailand for further research in 2024, this time to explore the very different trajectories of provincial cities versus Bangkok, and the challenges of what I call an "over-developed city in an under-developed democracy," which continue in Chiang Mai today. Studying these challenges through the lens of urban history will, I believe, offer lessons for smaller, secondary, and intermediate cities across Asia dealing with similar challenges.

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Notes

[1] https://cmocity.com/chiang-mai-art-cultural-centre/
[2] https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6003/
[3] https://prachataienglish.com/node/7276
[4] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-43940796

Chiang Mai between Empire and Modern Thailand. A City in the Colonial Margins.

Taylor M. Easum, December 2023

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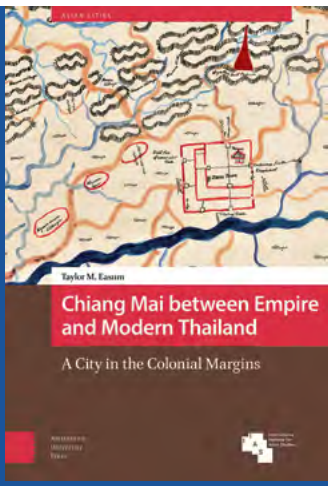

ASIAN CITIES
Taylor M. Easum
Chiang Mai between Empire and Modern Thailand
A City in the Colonial Margins

Urban histories tend to be dominated by large, global cities. But what does the history of the modern, colonial era look like from the perspective of smaller cities? By shifting the focus from the metropolis to the secondary city of Chiang Mai, *Chiang Mai between Empire and Modern Thailand* provides an alternative narrative of the formation of the modern Thai state that highlights the overlap between European, American, and Siamese interests.

Through a detailed analysis of Chiang Mai's urban space, the power dynamics that shaped the city come into focus as an urban-scale manifestation of colonial forces—albeit an incomplete one that allowed sacred space to become a source of conflict that was only resolved in the years before WWII. Today, as the city confronts the challenge of overdevelopment, the legacy of the colonial era, and the opportunity of heritage preservation, this deep, multi-layered history of the power of (and over) urban space is vital.

Taylor M. Easum is Associate Professor of History at Indiana State University with research interests in Southeast Asian, urban, and colonial history. Recent publications include articles on contested urban networks, the construction of Thai and Lao ethnic identity, monuments and historical memory, and ongoing questions of urban heritage in Southeast Asia.

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 and beyond from a comparative perspective, comparing Asian cities with those in the rest of the world. The clusters comprise three inclusive research and activist networks (UKNA, SEANNET, RNC), forming a vibrant 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)

UKNA is an 'umbrella' network of scholars and professionals interested in urbanism in Asia and Asian cities from an international perspective. It was established with core support from the EU between 2012 and 2016, connecting over 100 urban scholars from universities in Europe, China, Hong Kong, India, and Singapore. UKNA is coordinated from IIAS, but the network's strength is its partners and partnerships across Asia and beyond. Its current flagship projects are the Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network (SEANNET) and the River Cities Network (RCN).

www.ukna.asia
Coordinator: Paul Rabé
Email: p.e.rabe@iias.nl
Clusters: Asian Cities; Asian Heritages

River Cities Network

The 'River Cities Network' (RCN) is a 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.

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 have forged 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.

Next ABRN Conference:
Negotiating Asian Borders: Actors, Displacements, Multiplicities, Sovereignties
Irbid, Jordan, 2-4 September 2025
Deadline CfP: 1 November 2024 (see page 46)

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).

Next Conference:
Africa-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge - Third Edition
Dakar, Senegal, 11-14 June 2025
Deadline CfP: 1 October 2024 (See page 5)

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 inclusive transnational platform and 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
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Email: m.p.amineh@uva.nl
Cluster: Global Asia

The Silk Road Virtual Museum

The Silk Road Virtual Museum is a collection of virtual museum sites and exhibitions that showcase the art and culture of the regions that lay on the historical trade routes between Europe and Asia. The mission of a virtual museum is to encourage people to explore and appreciate the cultures along the overland and maritime sea routes between the Far East and Europe. To date, the Silk Road Virtual Museum comprises 17 virtual museum sites and exhibitions and 12 eLibraries on a variety of topics. The research is being supported by students from the BA Degree in International Studies at Leiden University. Project development is being encouraged by an international network of scholars. The project is directed by VirtualMuseum360 and supported by IIAS.

If you are interested in setting up your own Virtual Museum, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Coordinator: Richard Griffiths,
Director of the VirtualMuseum360 project
E-mail: info@silkroadvm.com
Website: https://silkroadvirtualmuseum.com

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
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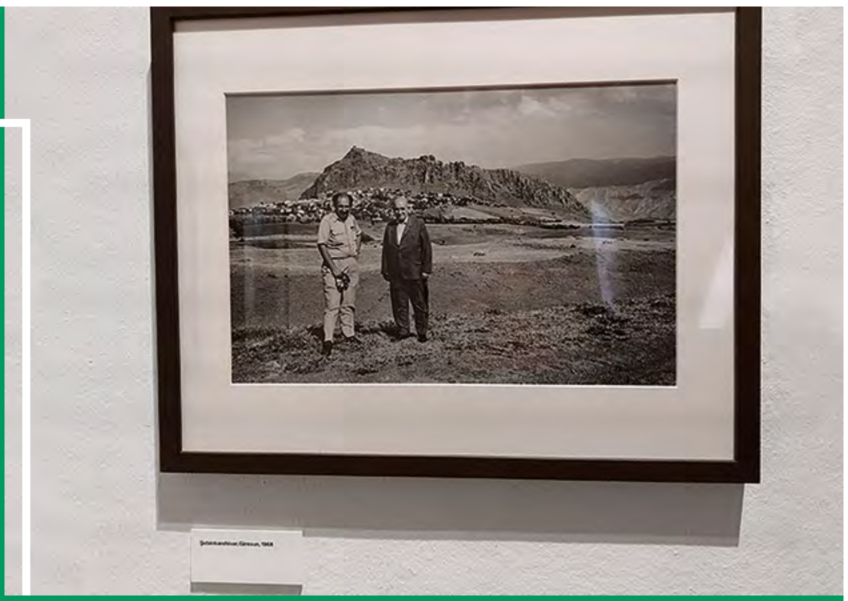
Cluster: Global Asia



Setting the Tone: In Lieu of an Exhibition Review

Tina Bastajian

In June 2023, Foam (Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam) mounted the exhibition *A Play of Light and Shadow*[1] with works by the renowned Turkish-Armenian photographer Ara Güler (1928-2018) in close collaboration between Foam, co-curator Mehmet Polat (Studio Polat), and the Ara Güler Museum in Istanbul. As a photojournalist, Güler's work has circulated in countless international newspapers, photo books, and exhibitions. His legacy, with work collected in prominent institutions worldwide, is being meticulously presented, preserved, and conserved by the Ara Güler Museum and the Ara Güler Archives and Research Center.

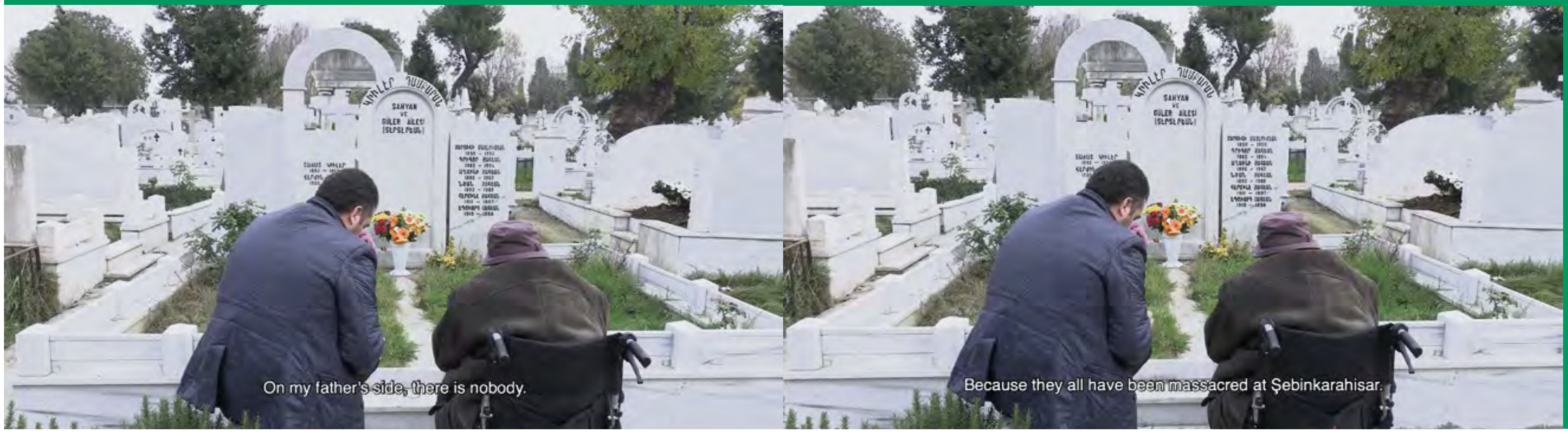

On my father's side, there is nobody.
Because they all have been massacred at Şebinkarahisar.

Fig. 1 (above): Foam gallery view: Ara Güler pictured with father Dacat Bey in their family's hometown of Şebinkarahisar, 1968. (Photo by Tina Bastajian, 2023)

Fig. 2 (left): Two screen stills from *Once Upon a Time in Istanbul*, directed by Samuel Aubin (Rhizome, Periferi Film, 2017).

Ara Güler was born Mıgırdiç Ara Derderyan in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district just five years after the forming of the Turkish Republic (1923). This district was also known as Pera during the late Ottoman period and for its vibrant multi-ethnic community in Constantinople that included Turks, Armenians, Jews, and Greeks. Educated in Armenian secondary schools, it was during his high school years that Güler became involved with theater and film productions, and then joining as a photojournalist for the newspaper Yeni Istanbul, and later with the daily paper Hürriyet.

Güler would ultimately gravitate towards the photographic medium yet keeping his affinity to the cinematic, which is evident through his use of mise en scene and dramaturgy of facial and gestural expressions and urban atmospheres that instill both filmic narratives and documentary traces through a palette of monochromatic densities. If you have ever seen luscious black and white photographs depicting the weathered faces of Armenian fishermen from Istanbul's Kumkapı neighborhood (circa 1950's), or a starkly lit backstreet in Galatasaray, it was presumably a photo taken by Ara Güler. During his lifetime, he photographed conflict zones from Eritrea to Sudan and composed portraits of the famous, from Maria Callas to James Baldwin. Güler gained notoriety as many of his images and interviews were included in prominent publications (*Paris Match*, *TIME*, *Newsweek*, etc.) as well as signing on with photographic agencies throughout Europe, and beyond, such as Magnum Photos after meeting French photographer Henri Cartier Bresson. In 1962 Güler was awarded the title of 'Master of Leica' and subsequently in 2016 he received the Leica Hall of Fame award.

I leave the exhibition at Foam overwhelmed by the amazing range of Güler's work in form, content, and context, and at the same time, bewildered with certain curatorial decisions that informed the overall framing. These include carefully muted phrasings that avoid pertinent and relevant contextual information that would not only inform attendees of historical, political, and personal details and how they overlap, but would also render and situate Güler's biography in relation to his work, and how this reverberates in present-day Turkey and within her many active diaspora(s). This is present in the exhibit's paratextual elements that include extended wall texts, labels, and parts of the exhibition catalog. I am not so sure a viewer largely unfamiliar with Güler's work would pick up the meager contextual breadcrumbs scattered around the exhibit that suggest Güler's Armenian heritage and its connection to the historical and political realities of a man who witnessed countless pivotal stages of the Turkish Republic, hence his moniker, 'the Eye of Istanbul.'

The Foam exhibition dances around historical specificities, most evident in the omissions in the wall texts, which also reappear within the publication. The euphemistic phrase "the events of 1915" is used to refer to the Armenian genocide, eliding an opportunity to give historical context. Additionally, the phrase *the events of 6/7 September 1955* is used to describe the Istanbul pogroms (also referred to as riots) targeted primarily against the Greek minority in Istanbul's Pera district – including churches, businesses, private properties, etc. – but which also extended to Jews and Armenians. However, much more space is given to the political context, which passionately captures the mayhem in Pera and conjures narratives of pillage and looting from the Armenian genocide (1915-1923). Thus, thinking through the lens of historicity, might the ways in which Güler, his family, community, and culture are positioned as minorities within Turkish society deepen our understanding of his work? As scholar Talin Suciyan lucidly states, "Armenians in Turkey were pushed to the edge, as they did not have any means to struggle for Genocide recognition and were constantly terrorized and criminalized for being Armenian. Hence, the more violent state denial became, the more the Armenian community squeezed into Istanbul was forcibly co-opted into this denial in order to survive."[2]

This short text is unlikely to fill in all the contextual and biographical details attributed to Güler's witnessing eye that spanned decades. Indeed, his was a rich life, one in which he was simultaneously witnessing the ghosts of his Armenian heritage whilst thoroughly embracing his Turkishness. The exhibition and its blind spots led me to contemplate my own family's history and how coping strategies around state-sponsored denialism have played out across continents, generations, and contexts. I enter a small space adjacent to the gallery and watch the entire one hour documentary on Güler by French filmmaker Samuel Aubin. Towards the end of the film, I take note (and a few photos) of two film stills that are subtitled. This encounter with Güler forms part of oral history that adds missing and crucial biographical and historical context lacking in both the exhibition and catalog. These two film stills speak volumes especially in juxtaposition with the gallery image of Güler and his father in their family's village of Şebinkarahisar to which such vital details are missing on the wall label (Fig 1). Here I am reminded of the quote by cultural theorist Fred Moten: "I feel anything that I have to say, that's because a whole bunch of people, a whole bunch of history, a whole bunch of things sent me to say it."[3]

I began this essay with a short description of Güler that qualified his Turkish nationality by hyphenating it to include his Armenian heritage. Said naming, however, did not make it into the paratextual elements in *A Play of Light and Shadow*. The ascription of a hyphenated Turkish-Armenian label to Güler is by no means an anomaly. In fact, many artist bios, including those that figure prominently from non-Armenian and non-Western sources, have also readily hyphenated Güler's identity.

While the Foam exhibit lists the Güler family's original Armenian surname (Derderyan), albeit in the last sections of the exhibit, it conveniently brushes over the Turkification of surnames. The Surname Law *(Soyadi Kanunu)*, instituted in 1934, was one of the last reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's modernization process during the transition from the Ottoman period.[4] While not obligatory for non-Muslims, for Armenians, this meant coming to terms with a 'semiotic burden'[5] by erasing the -ian/yan (family of) at the end of their names, or by changing their names entirely to not call attention to their ethnic and religious identity. Tangible remnants of the Surname Law still resonate in contemporary Turkish society, continually flattening history through the impediment of identity formation, yielding a constant struggle for equality for long standing ethnic, religious, and linguistic 'minorities' currently living in Turkey (Kurds, Alevis, Armenians, Yazidis, Syriacs, Assyrians, Jews, Greeks,

Fig. 3 (left): Ara Güler in 2018. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons user Necromancer569, reprinted under Creative Commons license)

Fig. 4 (below): Ara Güler's exhibition at National Gallery of Armenia. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons user Armineaghayan, reprinted under Creative Commons license)

Circassians, Roma, etc.).[6] The repercussions of the Surname Law produce othering mechanisms that are still prevalent in contemporary Turkish society, which echo the survival strategies of co-opting state-sponsored denial described in the passage by Suciyan.[7]

Understandably, the Foam exhibition on Güler (or any other exhibition on his oeuvre) is not meant to be a history lesson. Admittedly, from what I have read about and also understood from Ara Güler's video interviews, I suspect he would have vehemently resisted such framings. However, there is much at stake in terms of the politics of naming, and in the implications of linguistic markers bearing various aspects of familial belonging and ethnicity. The outdated laconic and hence censored descriptions of historical events turn a blind eye to similar silencing strategies in present-day Turkey. Such camouflaged omissions and resistance to connecting some basic dots in the Güler exhibit send a precarious message to museum visitors, especially for an exhibition taking place in The Netherlands. Given the recent (and long overdue) debates – and artistic and curatorial interventions – on decolonizing museums, such slippages of information are antithetical to resetting and repairing past and ongoing historical erasures of 'granular and textured histories'[8] in Dutch and international institutions.

Güler's famous moniker, 'the Eye of Istanbul,' got me thinking about the range of his delicate gazes cast on his beloved Istanbul and her denizens. Could his mastery to capture the fine gradations between light and shadow, stasis, movement, and gesture afford a certain perspectival *latitude*, which is influenced by both the complexity and nuances of this suppressed, cloaked, and erased history? How might curatorial frameworks, wall labels, and exhibition texts be revisited with this in mind? I take note of my strong hunch but am unable to fully understand and express the layers of history, identity, and experience behind Güler's lens.

I was able to catch the Foam exhibition one more time a few days before its closing. By kismet, an article by Turkish-Armenian journalist Rober Koptaş appeared in the online news platform CivilNet around that time. In it, Koptas writes, "Could Ara Güler's Armenian heritage have played a role in his transformation into a 'photo eye' that seemingly followed, scanned, observed, and recorded Turkey like Vertov's 'camera eye'? Could it be related to his coming from a community that had been pushed outside of life and forced to cling to the land it lived on, paying the price through being silenced and suppressed? Perhaps, as a reaction to being pushed to the margins and forced to live within the boundaries of his own small community, Ara Güler became a constantly observing eye. An eye that was both from the outside, more than a Turk could ever be, and from the inside, more than a foreigner could ever be. Maybe being an Armenian, living within the Turkish and Muslim majority, was one of the fundamental secrets of his magnificent shots."[9]

Such questions call for a deepening of (or a reckoning with) Güler's aesthetic, personal, and photojournalistic lens. I revisit the interview with the co-curators , which hints at this *unique* perspective. Foam curator Claartje van Dijk notes, "Our aim is to visualize different voices about Turkish identity." This is followed by *A Play of Light and Shadow* curator Mehmet Polat: "Thus, to understand modern-day Turkey better, we must examine its past. Güler's work provides a unique perspective into Turkey's history, allowing us to witness how he documented historical events and faced the difficult parts of the country's history head-on."[10] Given that the Netherlands has a large population of diasporans from West Asia that include Turkish nationals from different ethnic backgrounds, religions, and political affinities, these *difficult pasts outlive Güler as they* also fold into the present in terms of what is *overshadowed* in the narratives provided. What messages do these suppressed narratives send to visitors who yearn to find themselves somehow reflected, acknowledged? Or, for that matter, to enlighten tourists and the Dutch public at large?

This tonal essay scratches the surface of some of the oversights presented in the Foam exhibition and catalog. Much can be said for the richness of the catalog's essays and layout, the expansive exhibition design, and the care of presenting a fraction of Güler's extensive oeuvre. And, of course, the works on display are magnificent. Hopefully in the near future greater attention will be paid to the above-mentioned overshadowing of crucial and specific historical elements so that such semiotic and related *burdens* become precious and indelible maps to navigate anew.[11]

Tina Bastajian is a filmmaker, essayist, and educator. Her artistic research explores counter archival strategies, memory, displacement, palimpsest, and the contours of voice and translation. Email: tina.bastajian@sandberg.nl

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Notes

1 https://www.foam.org/events/ara-guler

2 Suciyan, Talin. "The Armenians in Turkey: From Autochthonous People to Diaspora," in *The Armenian Diaspora and Stateless Power Collective Identity in the Transnational 20th Century*, eds. T. Chahinian, S. Kasbarian, T. Nalbantian. (London, Bloomsbury, 2023) 17.

3 See: https://lithub.com/an-interview-with-fred-moten-pt-i/

4 Thanks to the Wayback Machine's capture of a copy of the reform document before this Turkish government page was removed. See: https://web.archive.org/web/20230101000000*/http://www.nvi.gov.tr/Files/File/Mevzuat/Nufus_Mevzuati/Kanun/pdf/soyadi_kanunu.pdf

5 Türköz, Meltem, "The Burden of Minority Names," in *Naming and Nation-building in Turkey*, ed. Meltem Türköz, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 143-162.

6 This does not include the more recent influx of migrant and refugee communities from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Cameroon, Congo, etc. Not to mention Turkey's deplorable record of censorship and human rights abuses toward their LGBTIQA+ community.

7 This overview, "Turkey: Article 301: How the law on "denigrating Turkishness" by Amnesty International while dated from 2006, outlines many cases and ramifications of Turkish Penal Code - Article 301 for 'insulting Turkishness' which still has repercussions in the present. See: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/003/2006/en/

8 Isha Iyer, "A Pedagogy of Reparations: Notes toward Repairing the Film and Media Studies Curriculum." *Feminist Media Histories*, no 8.1 (2022) 181–193.

9 https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/756094/letter-from-istanbul-the-irony-of-the-armenian-photographer/

10 Claartje van Dijk, and Mehmet Polat. "An Icon from Turkey: Unraveling Layers in Ara Güler's Photography." in *Ara Güler – A Play of Light and Shadow*, ed. van Dijk and Polat, (Antwerp: Hannibal Books, 2023), 15.

11 Many thanks to Francisca Khamis Giacoman for reminding me of the Fred Moten quote, and to Heleen Mineur for touching up my poor gallery photo taken with my phone. Also, I am very thankful to filmmaker Samuel Aubin for allowing me to use direct screen stills from his documentary. And lastly, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to writer and literary organizer Nancy Agabian for the careful reading of an early version of my text, and for her on-point suggestions.

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 Zubaan Publishers in India.

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Zubaan Publishers

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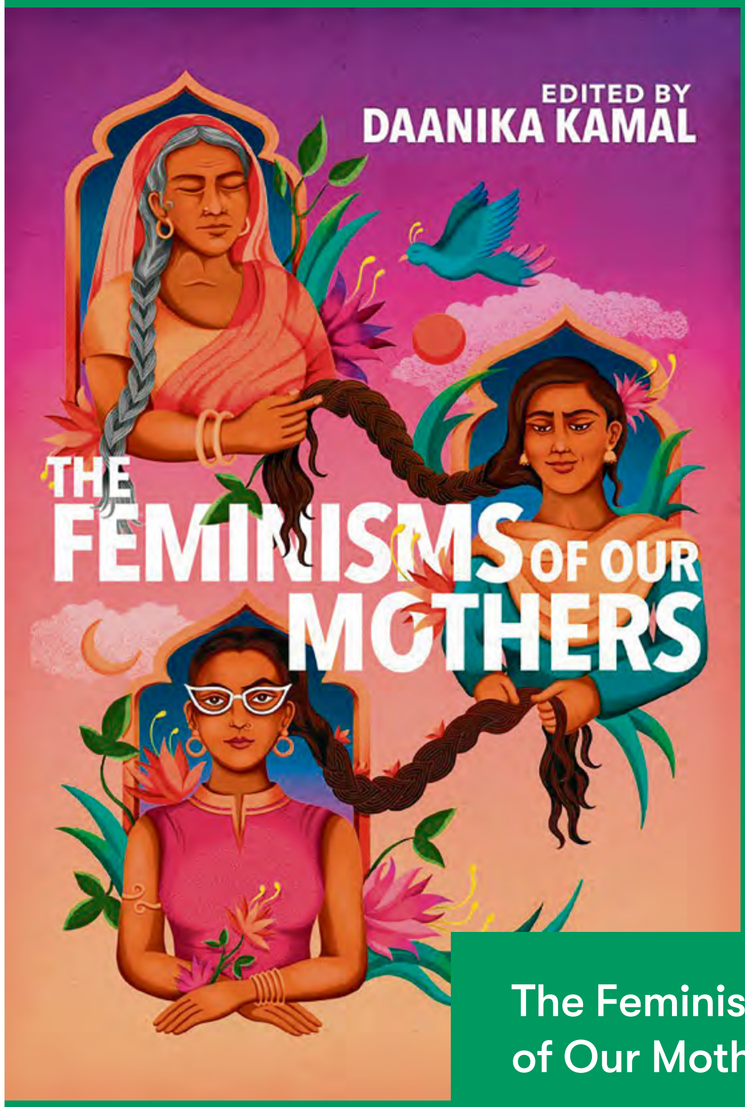
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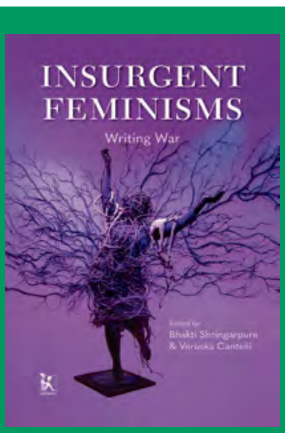
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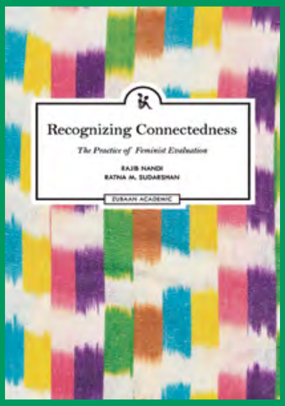
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