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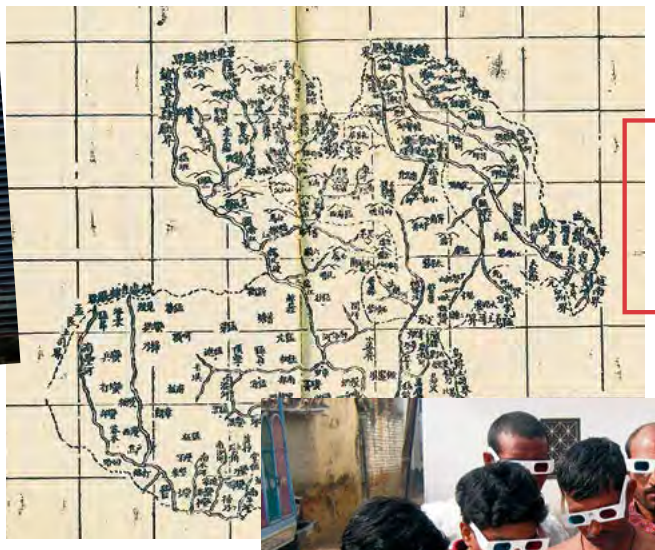
Diverse Voices and Multiple Languages

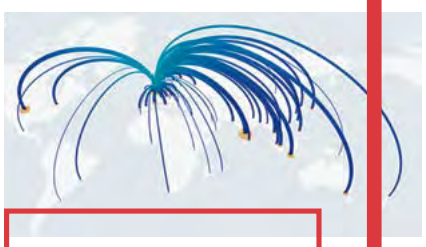


Mappings and Re-mappings

The Newsletter

100

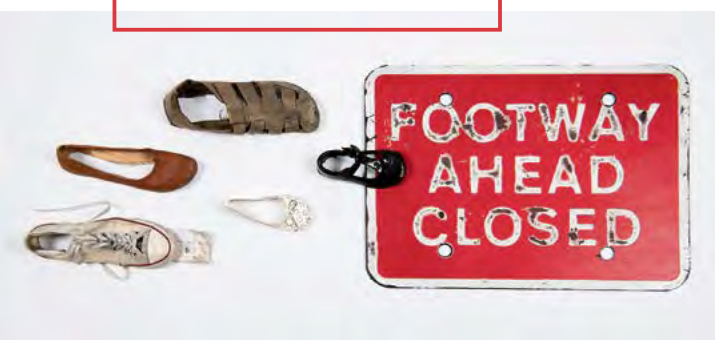
Readers around the World



Accessibility and New Formats

Critical Insights and Timely Interventions

Creative Expression and Artistic Collaboration



International Institute for Asian Studies

Contents

In this edition of The Focus

Celebrating 100 issues of *The Newsletter*

Paramita Paul and Benjamin Linder

The Newsletter has been an integral part of the International Institute for Asian Studies since its inaugural issue in 1993, the same year IIAS was established. Over three decades later, this special edition of "The Focus" marks the 100th issue of the publication. There are many facets that distinguish *The Newsletter* from both academic journals and popular media outlets, constituting a unique venue in which scholars, artists, students, and practitioners can join together in extended, critical discussions about key issues regarding Asia and its place in the world. Rather than commemoration or retrospection, "The Focus" offers a series of core priorities held by the publication and its editorial team: (1) Diverse Voices and Multiple Languages, (2) Mappings and Re-mappings, (3) Accessibility and New Formats, (4) Creative Expression and Artistic Collaboration, (5) Critical Insights and Timely Interventions, and (6) Readers around the World. Taken together, this constellation of values undergirds the continued significance, impact, and singularity of *The Newsletter* – and, for that matter, IIAS – within Asian Studies and well beyond.

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 p. 47, René Catalán Hidalgo writes about the symposium "Aspirational Infrastructure Research: Mobilities, Airports, Place" (AIR-MAP), which IIAS/UKNA co-organized in Seoul, South Korea on October 24-26, 2024. The following spread is devoted to the IIAS Fellowship Programme (pp. 48-49). First, Laura Erber introduces recent changes to the program, now called "Asia in the World" and entailing a multi-sited residency. Second, current fellows offer brief reflections on recent activities and visits to partner institutions. On p. 50, Benjamin Linder introduces the new volume *South Asia on the Move*, the latest title in IIAS' "Global Asia" book series with Amsterdam University Press. The next page offers an update from Humanities *Across* Borders, specifically reflecting on a textile design archive housed in Dakar, Senegal (p. 51). On pp. 52-53, members of the River Cities Network (RCN) present introductions to the network and a few of its members' ongoing projects in Brazil, Indonesia, and Egypt. Finally, readers can find the usual snapshot of IIAS' current research networks on pp. 54-55.

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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International Institute for Asian Studies

Universiteit Leiden

Milestones and Turning Points

Celebrating in Troubled Times

Philippe Peycam

Fig. 2: Entrance to the new IIAS offices at Leiden University. (Photo courtesy of IIAS, 2025)

This is the 100th issue of *The Newsletter*.

This seminal moment, in which we hoped to celebrate this milestone in the life of *The Newsletter*, was instead overshadowed by a challenging and extended period of uncertainty regarding the future of IIAS. On April 16, after four months of a rather opaque process of deliberation and evaluation, Leiden University publicly announced drastic cuts to several programs, including a gradual 50 percent reduction to IIAS' operational funding over the next four years. In the light of broader budgetary constraints affecting higher education in the Netherlands, the whole process began on January 14, when we were informed that IIAS was among several bodies that would undergo a stringent financial review. This review occurred at the hands of an ad hoc task force committee, which included no members from the humanities, social sciences, or Area Studies. For IIAS, there was a very real risk of total budgetary elimination at the hands of a university executive board whose current priorities may differ, and which perhaps has not yet had the opportunity to fully appreciate the unique contributions made by IIAS though its programs, initiatives, events, and networks. Against this background of existential threat, we at IIAS circulated an information letter among our partners across different sectors and geographies. In the space of one week, we collected over 400 statements of support – some of them extremely moving and powerful, and some emanating from members of Leiden University itself – expressing their utmost dismay and shock. On what became a communication campaign to salvage IIAS, we discovered the depth of support IIAS effectively enjoys within Leiden University, in the Netherlands, and worldwide, from academic and non-academic circles alike, including diplomats, journalists, artists, and other interested citizens. After over 30 years of existence, the institute has manifestly come to occupy a very special place in many lives, enriching not only Asian Studies and Area Studies, but also the very practices through which inter-cultural humanistic knowledge is generated and shared.

This strong showing of support appears to have positively influenced the final decision of the Leiden University Executive Board. On the one hand, we are heartened that the campaign led to some formal recognition of the critical importance of IIAS, and thus ensured its institutional survival. On the other hand, we must acknowledge that a 50 percent budget cut is hardly a victory in absolute terms. The decision significantly hamstrings IIAS' ability to operate vital 'public service' activities not covered by outside sources, from the renowned IIAS Fellowship Program to our widely read dissemination platforms like *The Newsletter*. The halving of our budget will irremediably harm the institute's capacity to plan and engage in future innovative ventures.

It is thus with deep frustration and dismay that we deliver this news. Of course we will continue to challenge the university's decision. We understand that these are difficult times requiring difficult choices, and IIAS is willing to carry its fair share of financial cuts imposed upon the university by political realities. Nevertheless, it should be allowed to pursue its core mission and sustain what it has been successfully doing for decades in the service of the wider knowledge community.

But writing such a gloomy note for the 100th issue of *The Newsletter* would not do justice to the level of forward-thinking dynamism and resilience that IIAS continues to demonstrate, not just amidst the grim context of destructive reductions of humanistic knowledge activities in the Netherlands, but, more generally, amidst the devastation currently at play in many parts of the world, notably as a result of the extreme policies pursued by countries like the United States.

For a few years already, IIAS has gained recognition for its unique 'South-South-North' vision, one seeking to effectively support a more multi-centered and circulatory process of knowledge creation and sharing, with the explicit recognition that the increasingly fragmented world we live in requires stronger capacities for mutual engagements between different world regions – crucially including what is called the 'Global South.' We believe a more balanced flow of knowledge exchange in favor of the South should also eventually benefit 'northern' institutions for their ability to engage with their 'southern' counterparts in a more reciprocal mode. IIAS foregrounded this model in the form of innovative pedagogical support under the Mellon-funded Humanities Across Borders (HAB) program. It was also brought to the multifaceted 'field' of environmental humanities with collective projects such as the Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA), the Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network (SEANNET), and more recently, the multi-disciplinary River Cities Network (RCN). Meanwhile, "Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge" – a platform designed for inter-cultural, inter-regional knowledge exchanges – stands as IIAS' most overtly multi-centered mode of intervention. Over time, these initiatives have led the institute and some of its close partners to consciously endorse an institutionalizing strategy grounded in a new model of knowledge sharing and circulation articulated as 'South-South-North.' The S-S-N vision entails a local-global framework of interventions and the participation of different knowledge actors or stakeholders around concrete situated projects. Eventually, these initiatives coalesce into a deliberately inclusive knowledge community beyond borders, built on shared experiences and thereby on lasting trust.

It is this S-S-N Knowledge Community approach that has been increasingly recognized by other institutions as a possible alternative to the traditional North-South cooperation model framed in exclusive bilateral terms. In the last two years, IIAS has led the trend in streamlining the different formats of its activities to more effectively support a converging mesh of people and organizations in Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America, and with it, the constitution of perennial new hubs or networks effectively forging a multi-pronged community of like-minded S-S-N knowledge actors. The 2018 Africa-Asia Conference in Tanzania eventually yielded a new Africa-Asia collaborative 'Hub' at the University of Dar es Salaam. In Surabaya, Indonesia, the preparation and organization of the ICAS 13 ConFest paved the way for the establishment of the inter-faculty university-national Airlangga Institute for Indian Ocean Crossroads (AIIOC), while in Thailand, Kasetsart University established the country's first Asia-Africa Program. The upcoming Africa-Asia ConFest in Dakar may also be an occasion for the Senegalese colleagues to establish an Africa-Asia-Latin-America platform, in collaboration with partners from these regions and counterparts in Europe and North America. In the Netherlands and in Europe, this trend is giving rise to a more conscious effort to reinvent collaborative knowledge engagements in today's multipolar world through new circulatory streams of exchange. This model can also serve to reposition Europe, and particularly some Europe-based knowledge institutions like IIAS, as reliable-facilitating partners to the Global South. The continent is indeed well positioned for implementing this new economy of knowledge exchanges in the making. In the last few months, IIAS has begun promising discussions with different services of the European Union, including the EU Parliament, to help frame a new strategy of engagement with the different Souths and Norths of the World.

These latter developments, if they are left to blossom, augurs to the possibility of a new chapter in the always-dynamic existence of IIAS, this, against the regressive and parochial forces it currently confronts. So, we hope this 100th issue of *The Newsletter* will be read as a message of resilience and hope for all that IIAS and its close partners stand for.

Fig. 1: Meeting in preparation for the upcoming ConFest "Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge" in Dakar, Senegal. (Photo courtesy of IIAS, 2025)

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The 100th Issue

Paramita Paul

Fig. 1: *Breadfruit tree*, pen drawing by Wanmin Huang [@wmh_888], 2025.

Figure 1 is a pen drawing of a breadfruit by illustrator Wanmin Huang. It is a detail of a branch with lush, gorgeous leaves, carrying large fruits of a tree that is well known across tropical areas from the South Pacific to the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. The 100th issue of *The Newsletter* opens with a piece on two leaves of the breadfruit tree that were purported to have been brought to Scotland from Tahiti via Mauritius. Sarah Easterby-Smith's emphasis on the *journey* of these leaves, and, particularly, on the *multiple narratives* in which the breadfruit tree is embedded, functions as a key element that connects all articles in this special, festive issue of our journal. The 100th issue brings together research on people, objects, and images, from Tanzania to Japan, Cambodia to Ghana, the United States to La Réunion, and many other places. In each case study, the focus is on movement, layers of histories, and perspective.

The Study

In Oceania, the breadfruit has been associated with spiritual forces for thousands of years. In her article for our section "The Study", Easterby-Smith shows that in 18th-century England, it inspires new narratives that speak about the significance of the figure of Captain William Bligh (1754-1817) in British naval and cultural history, overlooking the plant's connection with colonization and slavery, as well as its place in Oceanic and Caribbean cultures (pp. 6-7). Importantly, she notes how the leaves' placement in the herbarium of the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh is against a blank white background, accompanied by specimen sheets with handwritten and stamped connotations. This presentation invites viewers to accept the information as "fact," downplaying other understandings of breadfruit as "traditional knowledge." "Wherever we find breadfruit, we find human connections," Easterby-Smith concludes, and these connections are manifested as much in the existence of the plants as they are in the narratives told about them.

Competing narratives also characterize the lives of Kenyan runners in Japan (pp. 8-9). Michael Kentaro Peters probes the nuances of how these athletes understand their purpose in Japan, and describes how this differs from the expectations of their agents, coaches, employers, and the general public following them on various media. In Tanzania, John P. Cooper and Elgidius B. Ichumbaki investigate alternative forms of maritime heritage-making (pp. 12-13). Is there a way to resist official heritage narrations of the sea, and instead follow approaches that serve the needs of local communities? The remaining two articles in "The Study" take us from specific locales to the wider world of books (pp. 14-15) and the nebulous environment of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) (pp. 10-11). Introducing "The Antilibrarian Project", Sourav Chatterjee's personal essay reflects on his ever-growing collection of unread books and the manifold significances of a "microcosm that embodies a little bit of everything we ever want to know but will never come to know." Subsequently, Gabriella Angellini reports on her fascinating travels in the worlds of GenAI, in search of a visual depiction of "a romantic couple with a Chinese man and a white woman." This proves to be a near-impossible task, and she calls for more accurate and equitable representations.

The Slate, The Tone, and The Region

In our section "The Slate", dedicated to the debates, practices, challenges, and opportunities of 21st-century education, Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier and the students of the workshop "Repurposing Phnom Penh" introduce us to the activities they undertook in September 2024 (pp. 18-20). The workshop helped the students to familiarize themselves with archive institutions in Phnom Penh, and to critically appropriate materials. Joanna Masangkay then spotlights the establishment of the Gold City Football Club in Ghana (pp. 16-17), through the case study of her mentee, whose master's thesis laid the foundations of the club. Her article shows how academic projects can transcend scholarly boundaries and make a difference in society.

"The Tone" highlights art and creativity in the broadest sense of the term, and in this special issue includes Rosa Beunel-Fogarty's analysis of the Creole musical innovations in the work of Reunionese singer Maya Kamaty (pp. 30-31). In our era of globalization, artists such as Kamaty preserve Creole heritage through reinvention. Also, fifty years since April 17, 1975, the beginning of a genocidal regime led by the Khmer Rouge, Darozyl Touch writes about her multimedia storytelling project *Hau Proleung: Calling the Soul*, designed to symbolize the Khmer diasporic experience (pp. 32-33). Finally, Talisha Schilder and Nadja Ritter showcase a selection of eight conversations with and portraits of female traditional tattooists (pp. 34-35). In today's male-dominated world of traditional tattooing, they invite readers to connect to the stories of these women, who navigate and challenge complex power structures.

Our colleagues from the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies at Vilnius University are new to our section "The Region," and in this edition they introduce us to the history of Asian Studies in Lithuania (pp. 36-37). Also in "The Region," our regular guest editors from Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC) and the Center for Global Asia at NYU Shanghai have collected research on "Observing the Challenges of Regionalism in Northeast Asia from Comparative Perspectives" (pp. 38-41) and "Doing History of Childhood in China" (pp. 42-46), respectively.

A festive issue in challenging times

At 100 issues, *The Newsletter* remains the most widely read publication of its kind in Asian Studies. An exceptional phenomenon in the world of academic publishing, our journal and its satellite platforms of *The Channel* and *The Blog* make knowledge freely accessible to all, catering to and collaborating with a global community of partners, authors, and readers within and beyond academia. "The Focus" section of this special issue celebrates this by highlighting six core values and priorities held by our publication and its editorial team (pp. 21-27): (1) Diverse Voices and Multiple Languages, (2) Mappings and Re-mappings, (3) Accessibility and New Formats, (4) Creative Expression and Artistic Collaboration, (5) Critical Insights and Timely Interventions, and (6) Readers around the World. To complement our celebratory milestone, our subscribers' copies of issue #100 include a sticker specially designed by our graphic designer Paul Oram.

The 100th issue of *The Newsletter* is a festive issue, but it appears at an exceptionally challenging moment for IIAS and the values it represents. In The Netherlands and worldwide, right-wing governments are implementing budget cuts in higher education and cultural programs. At Leiden University, these cuts will especially affect the Humanities and the Social Sciences. The consequences comprise not just the loss of fields of study, worldwide networks and collaborations, archives, collections, data, and individuals, but also the loss of nuanced, careful, and clear thinking itself. To draw attention to this critical moment, and for the first time in the history of 100 issues of *The Newsletter*, we are printing a blank spread in the center of our journal (pp. 28-29).

Despite the impact of such budget cuts at IIAS, both the institute and *The Newsletter* will persist in our efforts to facilitate critical, humanistic, and collaborative work. We are grateful to our engaged community, and have been encouraged by the letters of support that we have received from all over the world.

Returning to the pen drawing of a breadfruit introduced at the beginning of this editorial, at 100 issues, *The Newsletter*, too, has travelled long distances. It has found itself to be part of multiple histories and narratives, just as it has become a central platform for the critical exploration and understanding of those histories and narratives. And just like the pen drawing of breadfruit – a representation of the plant that differs from its display in the herbarium or its Wikimedia photo – adds another layer and perspective to the story of this tree, we will embark on a new journey, and add yet another layer and perspective to our history.

Paramita Paul
Chief Editor of *The Newsletter*

The Microbiome of *The Newsletter*

Paul van der Velde

In May last year I was archivist in residence at IIAS when it was still located at Rapenburg 59. My task was to reduce the considerable amount of archival (paper) material to manageable proportions. The outcome constitutes 75 IIAS boxes which will now forever rest in Leiden University's archive.

When going through the boxes of *The Newsletter,* which started out as the *IIAS Newsletter* in 1993, I invited the present Chief Editor, Paramita Paul, to visit my 'office' in the attic of the Rapenburg building. She was pleasantly surprised to find a stock of old issues and did not hesitate to take it under her care. We only briefly broached the topic of this 100th edition, and she asked me to write a brief 'felicitation' and a forward-looking contribution.

In that context, it is impossible to ignore IT-related developments such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek. These will certainly influence both the contents and contributors of future editions of *The Newsletter.* When writing this I received a WhatsApp message from the IIAS founding director, Wim Stokhof, containing a photo (Fig. 1) with a one-word reflection: "Intriguing." He was the visionary who, when confronted by a conservative board, did not hesitate to defend a substantial budget increase for this publication. It enabled us to reach, in no time, a considerable part of the community of Asia scholars worldwide, not only in print but also online.

Thirty-two years ago online and e-mail were seen by many as a threat. We as an editorial team didn't. On the contrary, it is part of the *The Newsletter*'s microbiome to come to grips not only with Asian Studies, but also to grasp the tantalising array of new modes of expression IT-developments have to offer. These should fascinate instead of scare us. *The Newsletter* should stay true to its courageous microbiome!

Paul van der Velde
Founding Editor, 1993 – 1998

Fig. 1: *Vesalius*, Thom Puckey, bronze, 2007, Terneuzen. (Photo by Paul van der Velde, 2025). Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) is considered as the founder of modern human anatomy.

Lights, Camera, Revolution...

A tribute or accolade somehow feels out of character. What drew me to *The Newsletter* as its editor, in a distant past, was its energy like that of an emerging rock band. It was unconventional, a little defiant even, while it did one amazing thing that I had not seen elsewhere: it connected academics with other academics far outside their own circles. How? With what I'd call punk rock articles, short and captivating. Drawing a diverse crowd in and hopefully drawing them closer together.

Awards and honours feel anathema to the disruptive rock and roll spirit of *The Newsletter.* The best thing I can say is that it looks and feels thoroughly different. Love it. Spins and revolutions, spirals and turns. The design is cheeky yet again (nice work, Paul Oram). With it, I should mention the awesome illustrations and photographs as well. I am absolutely thrilled to see that the outlook is broadening to Asia's relationships with other continents such as Africa. *The Newsletter* is clearly looking forward, not backward. And much better than that, it keeps renewing and giving opportunities to scientists from across the globe to reach an audience of peers.

To all at *The Newsletter,* I hope you keep on rocking the boat, keep floating new ideas, and continue inviting and amplifying new voices, new authors to be heard far and wide across the academic community.

Maurice Sistermans
Editor, 2002 – 2004

Appreciation, Then and Now

In May 2011, during my very first week as Editor of *The Newsletter,* I was approached by a researcher long associated with IIAS. He wondered if I was aware of how significant the job I had taken on really was. I was still finding my bearings, and the weight of his comment had quite an impact at the time. However, over the following 10 years, during which I had the honour of guiding *The Newsletter* to publication, I came to understand what he meant. I soon realised the unique position the publication had carved out for itself: non-peer reviewed, free to read, and offering an accessible-to-all style of writing. *The Newsletter* welcomes contributions from Asia scholars at any stage of their career or research – does not make them jump through a zillion reviewer hoops, or wait 18 months before publication – and then makes their knowledge available to any and all interested readers around the world.

I became acutely aware of the appreciation of the hundreds of contributors to the 31 issues I edited. They often shared with me what the publication meant to them, but I'd like to take a moment to share what it meant to me. I experienced immense satisfaction in helping authors bring their ideas to life on the page, creating clarity in what, at times, can be a murky process. I felt a deep sense of connection when reaching out to scholars around the globe and discovering what they were working on. And then, often after long periods of emailing back and forth, I also enjoyed the fantastic camaraderie when we would meet face-to-face at one of the Asia conferences each year. No small part in all of this was played by my wonderful colleagues; IIAS was truly a warm home for me for those 10 years. And a special thanks to our incredible graphic designer, Paul Oram. The man has the patience of a saint.

Now, under the guidance of my talented successors Paramita Paul and Benjamin Linder, *The Newsletter* is celebrating its 100th issue! I would like to congratulate everyone involved, both 'back then' and now, for this tremendous achievement. I hope the significance of this publication endures for many years to come.

Sonja Zweegers
Editor, 2011 –2021

Fig. 1 (from left to right): the cover of previous issues #1, #27, #50, and #98

Captain Bligh's Breadfruit?

Tall Tales about Two Leaves in Nineteenth-Century Edinburgh

Sarah Easterby-Smith

Of the many thousands of dull brown leaves stored in the herbarium (dried plant collection) of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh (RBGE), two apparently have a special history. Once growing on breadfruit trees on the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius, these two leaves were picked and pressed in the nineteenth century and taken to Scotland [Figs. 1-2]. A note attached to each states that the original plants were introduced to Mauritius by one Captain William Bligh, a man notorious – in British culture at least – as the subject of one of the most serious mutinies in British naval history. But was this really the case?

Reading plants

At first glance, herbarium specimens do not appear to lend themselves readily to historical analysis. Purposefully decontextualized by their scientific creators, the two-dimensional specimen sheet reduces information to the key points required for botanical classification. Of the two specimens considered here, handwritten annotations state that the first leaf was collected in 1834 and the second two years later, in 1836, both from Mauritius (Figs. 3-4). Further notes record their botanical names according to Linnaean binomial nomenclature.[1] The stamped texts – 'Ex. Univ. St. Andrews' (1834) and 'Herb. James McNab Demonstration Collection' (1836) – indicate that the specimens were part of other Scottish collections before their accession to the main herbarium of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.

From this, we can begin to infer some details about the geographical journeys that the two leaf specimens are likely to have taken: By the 1830s, the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius was a British colony and was well connected by sea transport to mainland Britain. The person who collected the 1836 leaf is even named on the sheet – one Dr J.B. Allan. He was, we presume, either resident in or visiting Mauritius; he probably also enjoyed a connection with the Scottish universities and botanical gardens that eventually received these specimens.

Fig. 1: Artocarpus altilis (Parkinson) Fosberg (E E00107356). Collected in Mauritius in 1834. Image reproduced with the permission of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

Fig. 2: Artocarpus incisus (Thunb.) L.f./Artocarpus communis (J.R. Forst. & G. Forst.) (E E01462864). Collected in Mauritius in 1836. Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. (Photo taken by Sarah Easterby-Smith, March 2019)

Breadfruits in British culture

Breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis* [Parkinson] Fosberg) is a flowering tree from the mulberry and jackfruit family *(Moraceae)*. It is relatively well known in the tropical parts of the world where it grows, but today few people in chilly Britain have heard of the plant. Yet, in the years around 1800, this tropical plant was the subject of immense public attention.

The final annotations on each sheet gesture toward that public interest. The two leaves were apparently taken 'from one of Capt[ai]n Bligh's original plants' (1834) and 'from one of the plants introduced by Captain Bligh' (1836). Commander of the ship HMS *Bounty*, William Bligh (1754–1817) was tasked in 1787 with obtaining a large consignment of breadfruit plants from Tahiti and then transporting them round the world to the islands of St Vincent and Jamaica in the Caribbean, where they were to be introduced as foodstuffs for enslaved peoples.

Bligh's breadfruit transplantation mission was *the* most ambitious of such projects of its time. Transporting live plants by sea was tremendously challenging due to the length of time away from land, the unpredictable and often hostile conditions that ships were exposed to, and the limited resources available aboard – particularly the lack of fresh water. No one had ever before attempted to move living plants quite so far in one go. But the economic potential of the breadfruit was huge: the plant was believed to be the solution to the pressing problem of how to provide enough food for the enslaved labourers on Britain's colonial plantations.

Bligh's mission, however, ended in disaster. In 1789 the crew of the *Bounty* mutinied, set him and eighteen other men adrift in a longboat deep within the Pacific Ocean, and threw the tiresome cargo of breadfruit trees overboard. Miraculously, Bligh and all but one of his men survived (the saplings did not). Although the tale of the mutiny is still relatively well known in British culture, few people are aware that the *Bounty*'s mission was to transport breadfruit plants.

Few people are also aware that Bligh accepted a second breadfruit commission shortly after his return to Britain. From 1791–92, he returned to Tahiti aboard HMS *Providence*, collected over 2000 live breadfruit plants, and sailed westwards from there across the Indian Ocean to the Caribbean, thus fulfilling the original brief. As a result of this mission, breadfruit was successfully introduced into the British Caribbean. Although initially rejected by the people enslaved there, it is now celebrated as a key part of Caribbean food culture.

Perhaps understandably, given the breadfruit's associations with a swashbuckling history of deception and derring-do, many British popular histories that are purportedly about the plant actually focus *ad nauseum* on the story of William Bligh and the *Bounty*. They generally downplay the plant's connections with colonisation and slavery, and they also overlook the significant place that the breadfruit occupies within Oceanian and Caribbean culture. This is the received history of the breadfruit, and one with which, thanks to the annotations on the sheets, these two specimens have been explicitly associated for almost two hundred years. But further investigation into their provenance reveals that the claimed association with Bligh might, in fact, not have existed at all.

Pacific histories

Researching provenance, when the subjects are plants, first involves a spot of botany. The ancestors of all breadfruit plants originated in New Guinea – an

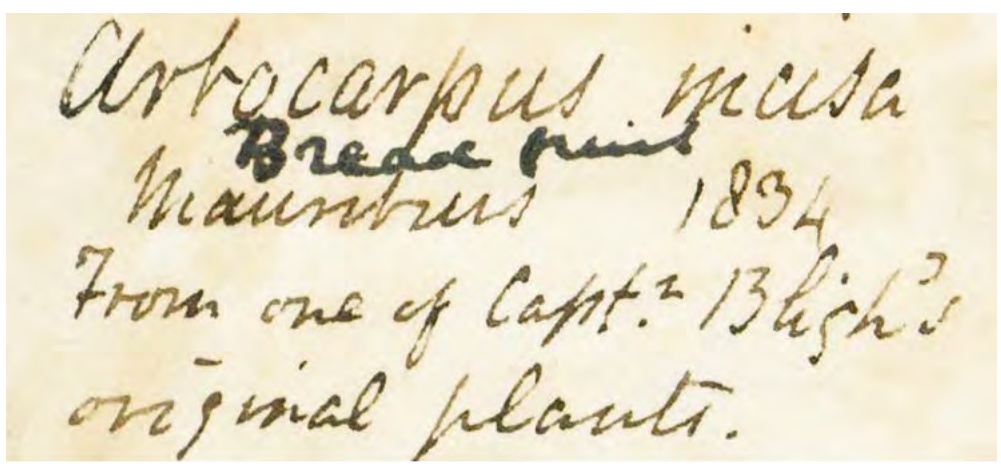

Fig. 3: Detail of Fig. 1, showing the label appended to Artocarpus altilis (Parkinson) Fosberg. (E E00107356).

island that is over 7000 kilometres to the west of Tahiti. Gradual human migration across Oceania over thousands of years meant that, by the eighteenth century, breadfruit was widespread across, and appeared endemic to, the entire region.[2] But transporting breadfruit over long distances is very challenging: in botanical terms, the plant's seeds are recalcitrant, which means that they will not grow unless planted within a specific time period after ripening. As breadfruit seeds cannot be stored for long, the only way to transport the plant over distance is through propagation, which resulted in the gradual creation of hundreds of cultivars (cultivated varieties) that are now distributed very widely indeed. One of the most significant consequences of that selective breeding has been a reduction of seeds within the fruit of some cultivars. In sum, the further away from the breadfruit's point of origin in New Guinea, the fewer the number of seeds to be found in the fruit of each cultivar. Tracing cultivar distribution is now a highly instructive means of identifying the past migration routes taken by humans.[3]

And the breadfruit was high up on the packing list of every Oceanian traveller – for the plant and its products have an almost unrivalled ability to provide for, and even to protect, humankind. The fruit can be eaten (raw or cooked), and it can also be preserved in a handy paste for travelling. It can be used as animal fodder and fishing bait. Its wood makes excellent timber, firewood, and musical instruments, and the tree's inner bark can be turned into cloth. Its sap can be used as a glue, as a means of waterproofing or caulking boats, as a base for dyes and even as a chewing gum. Its leaves can be used as sandpaper, plates, food wraps, fans, and kites. When burned, the male flowers act as a mosquito repellent, and the sap, shoots, roots, bark, and flowers can each be used in a wide range of different medicinal remedies.[4] In sum, the prolifically growing breadfruit has been, and still is, a holistic provider for humans.

Given this outstanding array of properties, it is perhaps not surprising that, across Oceania, the breadfruit has been associated with a spiritual force and is talked of as a divine gift linking the human and spiritual worlds. Tahitian origin stories, for example, tell of how, during a famine, a desperate father sacrificed himself to the gods in return for food for his family. The food that was sent – growing wondrously out of his grave – was Tahiti's first ever breadfruit tree.[5]

Moving forward to the eighteenth century, such tales are unlikely to have received much credance from the sailors who accompanied William Bligh. And they certainly don't feature among the annotations on the herbarium specimen sheets. Nevertheless, the claimed association with Bligh suggests that the breadfruit in fact continued to inspire new narratives wherever it travelled.

Breadfruit narratives

The unfortunate *Bounty* never reached the Indian Ocean, and its leafy cargo was thrown overboard. Thus, the plants from which the two leaves shown here were plucked must have been conveyed by the *Providence*. According to the logs kept by Bligh and other crewmembers, Tahitian breadfruit plants were laded aboard in June 1792, and the ship set sail shortly afterwards. But from this point onwards, the narratives told about them diverge significantly from the available evidence about the geographical journey taken by these two specimens.

Fig. 5: Breadfruit at Tortuguero, Costa Rica. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons user Hans Hillewaert and reprinted under Creative Commons license, 2009)

The addition of William Bligh's name to these Mauritian specimens suggests that the *Providence* either stopped off at Mauritius *en route* or that Bligh sent the breadfruit to the island at a later date. Island stopovers were normal for ships taking long-distance journeys, allowing them to undertake repairs and to lade fresh provisions. Indeed, the presence of over 2000 live plants aboard placed additional pressures on the voyage because of their need for fresh water. A visit to Mauritius in 1792, however, would have been a rather surprising choice for Bligh because the island was a possession of Britain's main colonial rival, France, with whom Britain had been formally at war since April of that year. Indeed, the official instructions issued to the *Providence* directed it to call at Madagascar, if need be, and not at the Mascarene islands.[6]

The log of the *Providence* clearly shows that the plants and people aboard were all in robust health as they traversed the Indian Ocean; the ship stopped neither at Mauritius nor at Madagascar and instead continued onwards to the British-held Atlantic Ocean island of St Helena.[7] Given that revolutionary France was Britain's declared enemy in 1792, it is also extremely unlikely that Bligh – a naval commander – would have even considered gifting specimens to the French agronomists on Mauritius. Although the annotations on the specimen sheets assert that the Mauritian breadfruit was derived from Bligh's plants, this cannot have been the case.

Mauritius passed from French to British control in 1810. Genetic analysis of the breadfruit trees now growing on the island, paired with archival research, has revealed that Mauritius received at least three introductions of breadfruit cultivars during the eighteenth century.[8] It is not clear, however, which cultivar or cultivars are represented by the RBGE specimens. What is clear, however, is that the addition of Bligh's name to the specimen sheets is a falsehood. We do not know whether it was Dr J.B. Allan, or the specimens' Scottish recipients, who added the annotations. Either way, claiming an association with Bligh and his renowned mission would have elevated the cultural capital associated with the specimens, enhancing their desirability as collectable items.

For almost 200 years, then, Scottish botanists have believed that these specimens originated from William Bligh's celebrated plant transfer mission. In fact, they may have had no connection to the *Providence*'s consignment of plants whatsoever. The claim made on the specimen sheets about the association with Bligh is a historical fiction, and one that speaks volumes about the cultural significance of Bligh's story both to early nineteenth-century British colonists on Mauritius, and to the botanists and historians who subsequently did not question the purported association.

Tall tales

The format and presentation of the RBGE specimens asserts the authority of Western science. The placement of each leaf on a blank white background focuses the viewer's attention on those objects only; the annotations further suggest that this information is all that is needed for our understanding of the plant. Anything else, we are asked to assume, must be irrelevant. Indeed, the authority commanded by Western science invites us to view the information on these herbarium sheets as fact; Oceanian breadfruit stories are relegated to a lower realm of "traditional" knowledge and – perhaps worse of all – myth-making and make-believe.

Archives, including herbaria, encourage us to consider the objects held within them in terms of the practices and processes of collecting: nomenclature and classification, geographical routes and scholarly networks. Those processes mirror the structure of the archive themselves. And yet when viewed from an Oceanian perspective, questions relating to collecting networks or taxonomy matter very little, and only at the moments of interaction with Europeans.

Instead, the breadfruit's multiple histories speak to very different matters. In Oceania, the breadfruit's ability to nourish, protect, and serve the human body leads it to be associated with a spiritual force. Even European science, despite its pretentions to objective abstraction, has not been immune to the cultural power of the breadfruit – as the fallacious claim to an association between the RBGE specimens and William Bligh shows very clearly. Wherever we find breadfruit, then, we find human connections. Those connections are manifested not only in the physical existence of the plants and the botanical specimens created from them, but also in the narratives told about them. Myth-making about the breadfruit has been as strong within British history as it has been in that of Oceania.[9]

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Notes

1 The name annotated on the 1836 specimen, *Artocarpus incisia*, is a mis-spelling of the designation 'incisus' – which is a botanical synonym for *Artocarpus altilis*. For the full list of the breadfruit's homotypic and heterotypic botanical synonyms, see: https://powo.science.kew.org/taxon/urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:582598-1 (Accessed 24 June 2024).

2 Noa Kekuewa Lincoln, Diane Ragone, Nyree J.C. Zerega, Laura B. Roberts-Nkrumah, Mark Merlin and A. Maxwell P. Jones, 'Grow Us Our Daily Bread': A Review of Breadfruit Cultivation in Traditional and Contemporary Systems', *Horticultural Reviews* 46 (2019): 299-384.

3 Lauren Audi, Gordon Shallow, Erasto Robertson, Dean Bobo, Diane Ragone, Elliot M. Gardner, Babita Jhurree-Dussoruth, Jacek Wajer and Nyree J.C. Zerega, 'Linking Breadfruit Cultivar Names Across the Globe Connects Histories after 230 Years of Separation', *Current Biology* 33 (2023): 287-297.

4 Lincoln *et al.*, 'Grow Us Our Daily Bread', 319-320.

5 Vanessa Smith, 'Give Us Our Daily Breadfruit: Bread Substitution in the Pacific in the Eighteenth Century', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 35 (2006): 53-75.

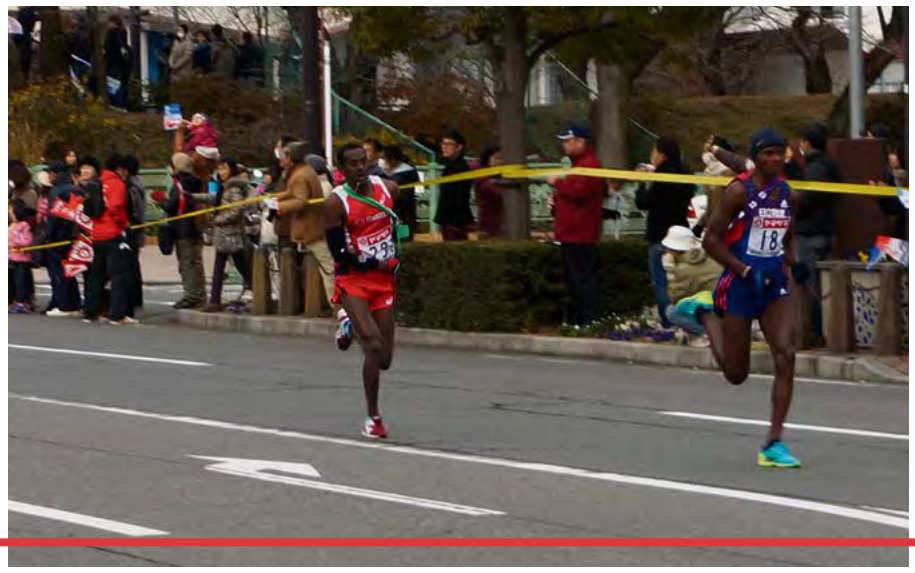
6 Dulcie Powell, 'The Voyage of the Plant Nursery, H.M.S. Providence, 1791-1793', *Economic Botany* 31/4 (1977): 387-431.

7 The National Archives, UK, ADM-55-153 PROVIDENCE: Log kept by W Bligh.

8 Audi *et al.*, 'Linking Breadfruit Cultivar Names', 292; Henry E. Baum, *The Breadfruit* (Washington, D.C.: H.L. McQueen, 1904), 229; Dorit Brixius, *Creolised Science: Knowledge in the Eighteenth-Century Indo-Pacific* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 105.

9 Many thanks to Henry Noltie and the staff at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh (RBGE) for their help with parts of this research. A chapter-length version of this piece is forthcoming as 'Breadfruit Itineraries', in Minna Törmä (ed.), *Plants and Gardens as Artefacts in Transcultural Contexts: Between Asia and Europe* (Routledge).

Fig. 4: Detail of Fig. 2, showing the annotations on Artocarpus incisus (Thunb.) L.f. (E E01462864).



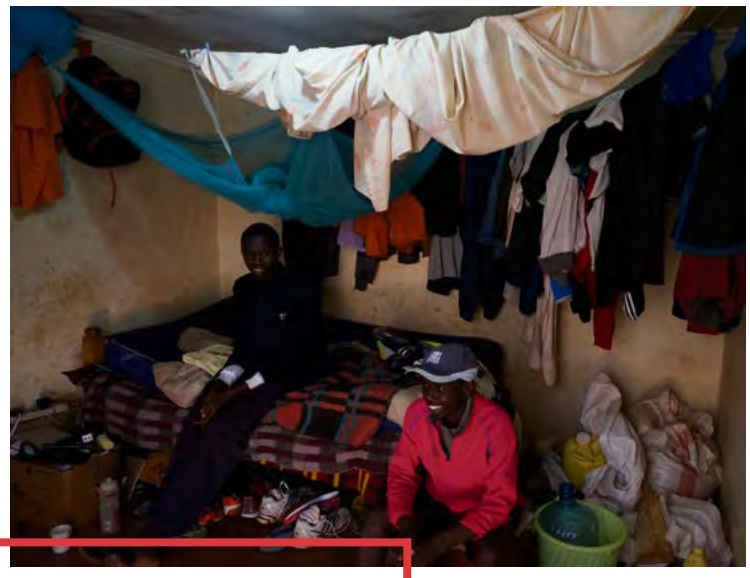


Fig. 1 (far left): A Kenyan runner (left) just after the transfer point between the first and second stages in the New Year Ekiden is adjusting his team's *tasuki*. (Photo by the author, 2015)

Fig. 2 (left): Talented runners in Iten with hopes of running overseas reveling in the moment. (Photo by the author, 2015)

Ekiden in the New Year

Maendeleo and the Gendered Expectations of Kenyan Runners in Japan

Michael Kentaro Peters

Japanese high schools, universities, and corporate-level teams rely on Kenyan male and female distance runners to elevate their institutions to prominence in a domestic market through their performances in *ekiden*, a style of long-distance road relay racing unique to Japan. Kenyan runners enrolled in Japanese high schools and universities are on full athletic scholarships residing on student visas. Subpar results or injuries may lead to their being replaced by another Kenyan runner, denting their post-graduation hopes of securing a coveted spot to run for a Japanese corporation. Those that run for a corporate team are on one-year contracts, and their prospects for renewals in the mercurial nature of the Japanese corporate sports structure is in the hands of agents, coaches, and employers who constantly evaluate their performances. Kenyan runners, however, understand their purpose in Japan is for fulfilling different objectives centered in Kenya. Measuring success is complicated. The only certainty among many uncertainties is that they must deliver peak racing performances during the early days of the new year to enhance their prospects of safeguarding what is most important to them.

Magical moment

Oshogatsu (お正月, "Japanese New Year") is observed during the first three days of every new year in Japan. Like American football on Thanksgiving Day in the United States, during *oshogatsu*, televisions in many households across Japan are tuned to *ekiden* (駅伝, "long-distance relay race"). Leading off on New Year's Day is the All-Japan Men's Corporate Team *Ekiden* Championships, also known as the New Year *Ekiden* [Fig. 1]. Another ekiden race, the Hakone Ekiden, is a cultural touchstone and takes over the national psyche for the following two days. For people at home who are not distance running enthusiasts, the lengthy broadcast of this university men's ekiden championship may simply be white noise. But each year, there is a magical moment that can disrupt the metronomic and monotonous nature of the half-day long telecast and suddenly command the attention of passive viewers: a runner vaulting his team from relative obscurity to immediate relevance by passing a number of competitors and winning the stage in record-setting fashion.

In almost all cases, this is done by an international student from Kenya. Out of the 210 student athletes participating in the 2025 edition, there were only six foreign students, all Kenyan. The second stage is where coaches traditionally enter their top runners, and this year, the Kenyan representing Tokyo International University (TIU) provided the magic. After the first stage, TIU was in 14th place, one minute and 48 seconds behind the leading team, Chuo University. By the end of the 23.1km second stage, Richard Etir of TIU passed 12 runners, catapulting his team to second place, only 40 seconds behind the leader. Three hours later, after all five stages were complete, TIU had slid back down to 11th place. After the second day, TIU rebounded respectably to finish eighth overall. No media outlet had favored TIU to win the team title, but Etir's performance scored a major victory for TIU's program. The one hour and five minutes he dominated gave TIU at least 50 minutes of screen time. Instead of TIU paying the network to air a commercial, TIU essentially received free advertising thanks to their ace runner. Performances like Etir's underscore the value Kenyan runners can bring to the Japanese educational institutions and corporations that recruited them. But that still only partially answers why some of the most promising distance runners from Kenya see Japan as a preferable destination, and how only a select few end up half way around the world in a country so culturally and linguistically foreign to them. There's much more behind what Kenyan runners may encounter along their journeys, and the story of a runner who arrived there decades earlier is a case in point.

From the age of 15, Martin[1] propelled his rural high school to national prominence with his captivating *ekiden* performances. But it is shortly after he entered college that he forever solidified his place in Japanese distance running lore. He did this at none other than the Hakone Ekiden. For consecutive years, he ensured that the uniform of his college team was front and center on television screens by the time he handed over the *tasuki* (襷, "traditional sash worn while running") to his teammate running the next stage. Martin became well known across Japan from these hour-long displays of athletic dominance over not only his Japanese competitors, but also his Kenyan compatriots. My decade of doctoral research coincided with the latter half of Martin's dozen years in Japan.

"The Hakone Ekiden means nothing in Kenya!"

Kenyan high school and collegiate runners in Japan receive a modest stipend between 50,000¥ and 80,000¥ (approximately €308 to €494), provided to them monthly for purchasing meals and an occasional pair of running shoes. Kenyan student athletes receive only a fraction when compared with the monthly salary of their corporate counterparts. Nonetheless, they are counted on by friends, family members, and others in their local communities in Kenya to make a similar degree of immediate financial contributions soon after arriving in Japan. Thus they often rely on a network of their Kenyan running elders based in Japan, who lend them money to help them deliver on expectations. The communal values prevalent in Kenya shape the ways Kenyan runners in Japan carefully manage the desires of personal well-being and constantly display a readiness to financially assist not only others in Kenya, but also other Kenyan runners in Japan. Most Kenyan student-athletes told me that they made it a goal to redistribute over half of each month's allowance back in Kenya.

Martin graduated with high school and college degrees before joining the corporate ranks. But his fastest performances as a runner came when he was still in university. While an undergraduate, he began to face adversity in multiple forms: losing two siblings, sporadic injuries, a lengthy battle with alcohol addiction, and more. His struggles as a corporate runner only intensified despite finally earning a monthly paycheck after seven years as an amateur athlete. Driven to rapidly make up for what he perceived in his own words as "years wasted," he overcompensated by almost always acceding to incessant requests for money coming from both Kenya and other young Kenyan runners based in Japan. He divulged that what caused the greatest shame was enduring harsh criticism from some in Kenya who would highlight the financial success of his Kenyan high school teammate Violet, who came to Japan the same year he did. Martin never came to grips with his resentment of being outperformed by a woman, unable to shake free from feeling inadequate as a man.

The women's collegiate *ekiden* is not as lucrative as the men's and has no counterpart that measures up to the

Fig. 3: Kamariny Stadium in Iten is an iconic training ground where many aspiring runners hope to earn an opportunity to run overseas. However, Iten is not a point of departure for any athletes aiming to reach Japan. (Photo by the author, 2015)

popularity of the Hakone Ekiden. Therefore, university programs eschew recruiting Kenyan women. Violet joined a corporate team straight out of high school and began receiving a monthly salary when Martin was a freshman in college. Martin lamented constant ridicule of being "four years behind her." When I brought up his accomplishments in the Hakone Ekiden and all the ensuing accolades, he interjected: "The Hakone Ekiden means nothing in Kenya! Nobody knows what that is!" Despite making what he felt was a consistent showing of his largesse back in Kenya, his sense of self-worth was heavily influenced by how he perceived his beneficiaries' evaluations of his living up to Kenyan norms of what it means to be a 'real man.'

Maendeleo

More than being a winner or loser, being *useful* is paramount for the runners I interviewed.[2] Being useful meant exhibiting signs of progress and promise embedded in *maendeleo*,[3] a Swahili word commonly translated as development, but also meaning forward momentum as well as individual and communal improvements. Because the Kenyan runners in Japan are pursuing a career in sport overseas, they are expected to accomplish *maendeleo* in both an expedited and grander fashion than what would be expected of them if they never left Kenya. Roughly two-thirds of the 150 Kenyan runners in Japan are men, and ideas of *maendeleo* among my interlocutors are also gendered, with patriarchal values influencing the different sets of expectations placed on men and women.

In Kenya, men are generally expected to settle down by the age of thirty and become the sole provider for their families, something which is becoming more difficult. A man who can guarantee financial security is considered a good husband and a respectable member of his community. Female runners from Kenya have increasingly accomplished *maendeleo*, challenging what is appropriate female etiquette by performing the stereotypically masculine role of overseas benefactor.[4] But based on what I observed, they ultimately knew when to retreat, to avoid being regarded by their male partners as a threat to their persona and sense of manhood.[5] Women are expected to bear several children, be good mothers and loyal housewives, and also look after their own siblings, mothers, and grandmothers. For both the men and women I followed, their pursuits of *maendeleo* while adhering to ascribed gender roles and norms required a great deal of dexterity and endurance.

Kikuyu and Kisii

My first round of Kenya-based fieldwork included time spent in Iten, a high altitude (2400 meters) running oasis in Western Kenya. Famously known in running circles as the Home of Champions,[6] Iten is located about 35 kilometers from the city of Eldoret, another running hub where many of the most elite and decorated athletes in Kenya build lavish homes. Dozens of training camps are situated in the surrounding towns and counties; therefore, thousands who hope to succeed as distance runners move to this region making a full-time commitment to train. One day, two athletes welcomed me to drink chai tea at their one-room apartment in a dilapidated tenement. When I mentioned bass from the boombox rattling the table, they shared a laugh while one teased the other about recently becoming "big time" after winning a local race and signing with an agent [Fig. 2]. The modest earnings from that victory enabled him to purchase a stereo. The joy from acquiring new audio equipment represented a conviction they shared that "more [*maendeleo*] was to come."

Later that afternoon, I went to nearby Kamariny Stadium, where hundreds of athletes train daily [Fig. 3]. In a matter of minutes, in the grassy infield, three runners handed me a folded piece of looseleaf requesting that I pass their contact information along to coaches and agents in Japan. Even when I reminded them that I am a graduate student and do not regard myself as a viable go-between, they insisted that I try to help them. I would discover later on my trip that neither the athletes grinding out intervals at a torrid pace nor the young runners who invited me for tea would likely end up in Japan. Runners like Martin or Violet never passed through Iten.

Out of the 42 ethnic groups in Kenya, the Kalenjin are the most renowned for their dominance in long-distance races. However, less than a handful of Kenyan runners based in Japan are Kalenjin.[7] In fact, almost all are Kikuyu and Kisii. Since a top agent recruiting Japanese runners is based in Nyahururu in Laikipia county, an area with a high concentration of Kikuyu, runners that the agent connects with a Japanese team will likely be Kikuyu. Similarly, most athletes in Kisii County will be of the Kisii ethnic group (like Martin and Violet). Moreover, since recruiters are long-established in particular areas in Kenya and have deep ties with particular institutions in Japan, the Kenyan runners at those Japanese high schools, universities, and companies will almost always be of the same ethnic background.

One elite Kalenjin runner who did make it to Japan was attending vocational school in Kisii County when he was noticed by a prominent Japanese recruiter. During the years he ran for a Japanese corporation, he earned a medal in a track event at the Olympic Games. Many Kalenjin runners are from Elgeyo-Marakwet County – where Iten is located – or neighboring counties. Had he been among the runners training at Kamariny Stadium, he presumably would not have earned an opportunity to run professionally in Japan. Instead, due to his elite level of talent, he most likely would follow the paths of other top-flight Kalenjin distance runners. Those who can gain recognition from agents usually compete overseas in Europe and the United States, but primarily live and train year-round in Kenya. Others may earn athletic scholarships for university running programs in the United States. Notably, all four of the medals earned by Kenyans at the Olympics Games in the men's marathon between 1988 and 2008 were by three Kikuyu runners who were based on Japanese corporate teams.

Fig. 4: Athletes, coaches, agents, and other onlookers watching the live telecast of the New Year Ekiden in the first-floor lobby of Takasaki City Hall in Gunma Prefecture. (Photo by the author, 2015)

New Year's Day

The most important day of the year for corporate male runners is New Year's Day in the city of Takasaki in Gunma Prefecture. I first went to the New Year Ekiden in 2015, hoping to watch Martin race and chat with him afterwards. Unfortunately, I only got to accomplish one of those two objectives. In the whole relay race, it is only the second stage in which foreign athletes are eligible to compete.[8] Thus, teams with two Kenyans can only place one on their roster for the New Year Ekiden. The race organizers had gradually reduced the length of this stage over the years in an attempt to appease corporations with all-Japanese squads, which have lodged complaints claiming other teams with foreign runners have an unfair advantage. Nineteen of the 41 teams in 2015 had Kenyans entered to run in what has been dubbed "the international stage" by running pundits. Forty-five minutes before the leaders were expected to arrive, many people on the first floor of Takasaki City Hall, including some Kenyans, directed their attention towards a giant screen showing the live broadcast of the competition [Fig. 4].

The second floor of the building was designated for athletes to change into their racing singlets, stretch, and keep warm until racing in wintry weather. There was limited time for brief conversations with other athletes, coaches, and some of the middlemen that control their fate in Japan. The stakes of the second stage are high: a strong performance in the second stage can solidify a contract renewal. Even those with Olympic pedigrees find themselves without a contract if their running prowess does not translate into convincing performances on New Year's Day. I noticed that Martin had not been stretching, nor did he go outside for a warm-up. To Martin's detriment, his head coach had chosen the other Kenyan on his team to race that day. This foreshadowed an earlier-than-hoped-for return to Kenya. If there was any silver lining for Martin, the position he 'vacated' would give his Kenyan teammate at least one more chance to make the grade and augment his own prospects for accomplishing *maendeleo*.

Final reflections

In contrast to most migrant workers that usually blend in with the general public, the dominance of Kenyan runners in Japan is widely witnessed, often televised as well as heavily covered and critiqued in both print and online media. Although Martin could hide his personal struggles, he could not conceal his regression as a runner and the decline in his athletic capabilities. He ended up back in Kenya as a result, and for a while, did not have a constant stream of income. According to other Kenyan runners, Martin eventually moved to the United States and found employment as a caretaker for the elderly – an occupation that men in Kenya typically disdain. It is unclear how many in Kenya know of his current whereabouts and circumstances. Martin seldom updates his social media accounts, but when he does, he uploads pictures of himself from his earlier days running in Japan. His posts are part strategic ambiguity, part reputation management, and part deliberate reassurances for anyone who visits his social media platforms. The money Martin remits to Kenya is far less than when he was a corporate runner, but it nevertheless continues to provide for his wife and children, as well as his parents, and in-laws. It even sustains a few local investments in farming. He continues to accomplish *maendeleo*, preserving his image as a capable man.

Violet's return to Kenya preceded Martin's by a few years. She did so as she was still trending upwards with her running performances, arguably before reaching her peak. Yet neither her husband nor anyone else in Kenya suggested that she reconsider waiting another year, even when she received contract offers. She complied with Kenyan ideals of respectable womanhood by starting a family soon after returning home. With her elevated status from her successful investments of *maendeleo* (purchasing and renting out properties, building homes, paying school fees for friends and relatives, buying livestock, and employing others), she is regarded as an esteemed leader of her community. To safeguard her husband's masculinity, she always made sure to deflect praise from others, and she never openly took credit for their joint *maendeleo*, made possible mostly from her earnings in Japan. Even when her husband's political ambitions did not go as planned, she proved her unwavering loyalty by joining him as an asylum seeker overseas.

Most Kenyan runners in Japan will never reach the heights of *ekiden* success like Martin or Violet. But for Kenyan runners, the very opportunity to live and compete in Japan is highly significant. If there is a Kenyan in the *ekiden*, it is not a matter of if, but when a magical moment will occur. Talent, tenacious effort, and steely determination are critical components of a strong performance. However, these runners are ultimately fueled by their desire to live up to the expectations, obligations, and fragile prospects of *maendeleo*, while also adhering to Kenyan norms of male and female respectability. Each year, the next wave of Kenyan runners in Japan race *ekiden* as hard as they can, especially during *oshogatsu*, harnessing their dexterity and endurance to succeed at achieving goals that are far more significant to them than winning, breaking records, and stardom.[9]

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Notes

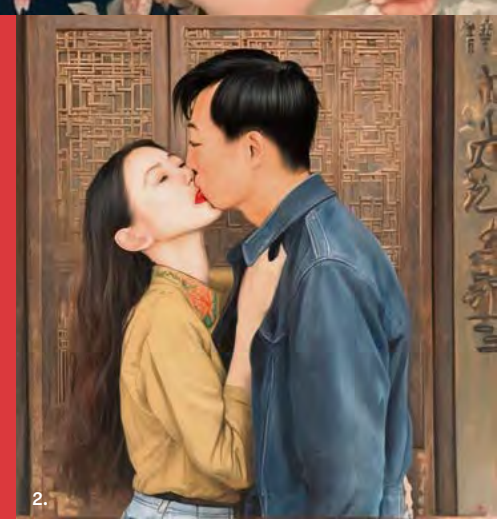
1 All names hereafter are pseudonyms.
2 Peters, Michael Kentaro. 2024. "*Maendeleo* and Manhood: Kenyan Runners in Japan", *Africa Today* 71(1): 25-44.
3 Some fruitful resources on *maendeleo* in Kenya are: Komen, Leah Jerop. 2021. *Mobile Assemblages and Maendeleo in Rural Kenya*. Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group.; Prince, Ruth J. 2013. "'Tarmacking' in the Millennium City: Spatial and Temporal Trajectories of Empowerment and Development in Kisumu, Kenya", *Africa* 83(4): 582-605; and, Smith, James H. 2008. *Bewitching Development: Witchcraft and the Reinvention of Development in Neoliberal Kenya*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
4 For a comprehensive account of Kenyan female distance runners, please see: Sikes, Michelle M. 2023. *Kenya's Running Women: A History*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
5 Peters, Michael Kentaro. 2021. "Friendship, Respect, and Success: Kenyan Runners in Japan", In *Sport, Migration, and Gender in the Neoliberal Age*, 101-118. New York: Routledge.
6 An exceptional work that details the history of Kenyan distance running and provides a section on runners that train in Iten is: Tanser, Toby. 2008. *More Fire: How to Run the Kenyan Way*. Yardley: Westholme Publishing.
7 Peters, Michael Kentaro. 2024. "The Endurance of Hope: Kenyan Runners in Japan", *African Identities* 1-15.
8 The 2025 edition of the race featured a different course with foreign runners limited to running in Stage 4, the shortest section which has a length of 7.6 km (600 meters less than the distance of Stage 2 in 2015). Instead of the city ward building in Takasaki, pre-race scenes like the one I observed now take place approximately 35km away at Ota City Hall.
9 The research reported herein has received funding from the European Research Council under Grant Agreement 295769 for a project entitled "Globalization, Sport and the Precarity of Masculinity" (GLOBALSPORT).

AI and the Unimaginable Couples

Chinese Men and White Women

Gabriella Angelini

1.



2.

Fig. 1-8: AI-generated images attempting to represent interracial couples. (Photos generated based on prompts by the author, 2024)

Despite what we like to believe, our intimate desires are never purely private and individualized. Scholars of transnational intimacies have widely demonstrated how romantic imaginings are shaped by media representations, historical legacies, and social interactions, which render certain relationships and pairings more legitimate, desirable, and "imaginable" than others.[1] One new form of representation – which has increasingly drawn attention since mid-2022 and might even be described as a new distinct "media" form – is Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI).[2] Just like other media and technologies, this comes with incredible potential, but also many problems and risks.

My first realization of the potential of GenAI in relation to academic research took place during one of our university Friday Seminars – academic presentations on different research topics followed by a Q&A session. The speaker shared with us his research on cancer patients in India. Due to privacy concerns, he had come up with an ingenious system to convey the setting of his fieldwork without showing us actual photographs: images generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI). One recent afternoon, as I was thinking about my own research project, those AI images suddenly popped up into my mind.

For the last few years, I have been conducting research about transnational and interracial romantic relationships in Hong Kong. Specifically, I focus on the lives, stories, and experiences of couples composed of a Chinese man and white woman. The fact that these couples are relatively "unusual" or "uncommon" was one of the factors pushing me towards this direction when I had to change my original doctoral project due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As I read through the many publications on transnational relationships and "interracial" intimacies, I soon realized that not much had been written on such pairings. Conversely, scholars have produced all kinds of interesting books and articles on Asian women and white (or Western) men.[3] Such scholarship, focusing on relationships which follow mainstream desires and patterns of attraction, has been extremely useful to understand how intimate relationships reproduce structural inequalities, but can also be potentially transformative. In the case of relationships between Chinese men and white women, they certainly constitute a "minority" in demographic terms, especially in Hong Kong, where since the British colonial period most interracial relationships were composed of local women and white men, through prostitution or the so-called "protected women" arrangement.[4] Even on a more global scale, such relationships are still relatively "uncommon" due to the construction of white women as inaccessible for "colored men"[5] and the gradual transformation of Asian men into feminized or asexual beings, through restrictive immigration and anti-miscegenation laws, negative propaganda, and stereotypical media representations.[6] Nevertheless, it is precisely because of these factors and their "unconventionality" that these relationships also warrant the attention of scholars. Moreover, the topic I am working on is even more timely in light of the changing geopolitical, socioeconomic and cultural context of a "rising Asia" and "declining West," with scholars demonstrating the declining currency of whiteness in East Asia, the emergence of an attractive form of masculinity embodied by Asian business elites, and the growing attractiveness of cultural phenomena like K-culture for Western audiences.[7] Thus, my research addresses the interrelated questions of how global and local socioeconomic changes transform intimate desires, and of how intersectionalities of race, gender, and class are reconfigured in these romantic relationships and their interactions with family, friends, and society at large.

Due to the meagre size of my friendship circle in Hong Kong and the scattered nature of the group I wanted to research, I decided to search for potential participants by approaching couples on the street, learning many insights about public visibility, racialization, and "proportions." What I mean with the last term is that it was relatively less common to see a Chinese man-white woman couple compared to two Chinese individuals or other white-Chinese interracial couples (same sex or heterosexual). Still, I interacted with over 60 couples (interviewing about 35 of them) and saw at least as many from a distance, especially after the fieldwork phase of my study was over. This configuration resonated with many of my interlocutors, who explained how in the past (and to some extent still in the present) it was "rare" or "uncommon" to see couples like them, but it was gradually (and hopefully) becoming more common. For some, this exceptionality was almost a source of pride, proof of their cosmopolitanism and open-mindedness, evidence of more equal relationships (compared to what they saw as colonial legacies), and setting an example for others, representing a hope for change.

Once the fieldwork part of my project was over, I began analyzing my data and making sense of it through writing. One of the dilemmas I faced was that I had taken photos during fieldwork with and of couples, but using those photos would mean that identities could not remain confidential. At the same time, because the couples I was researching were so invisible in media representation – it is still uncommon to see a Chinese/Asian man paired up with a white woman in films and TV series – and drew so many surprised stares in public, I felt that it was important to include some visual images of these "unusual" couples. That's how I remembered those AI generated images. Perhaps GenAI could be the solution to my predicament.

So, I began playing around with an app called Poe on my phone, which has different AI bots to choose from, some of which are free. I downloaded it because ChatGPT was not directly accessible in Hong Kong. I found a couple of image generators and typed in my first prompt. The first bot was called *StableDiffusionXL*. My prompt was: "A romantic couple with a Chinese man and a white woman" [Fig. 1]. The result was confusing to say the least. The image depicted what looked like a cartoon-ified wealthy Asian family: the husband on the left, wearing a suit with a visibly tanned face; a young girl in the middle, presumably their daughter; and the wife on the right side, with a paler skin color and her hair in a bun. Perhaps the bot had interpreted "whiteness" as the skin color of the wife, as she does indeed look fairly white. But why the child?

I tried again and again using different terms. I decided to change the term "white" into something seemingly more specific and "scientific," even though it has been criticized as an even more problematic term: "Caucasian woman – no kids"; "Caucasian woman (white, blonde, Western)." Nothing. All of the images continued to depict only couples with two Asian individuals. The bots continued to struggle with my prompts, seeming incapable of generating images of the sort of interracial couples with whom I work.

I redoubled my efforts, trying something more specific: "A Chinese man kissing a Western white Caucasian woman" [Fig. 2]. Here, I tried lumping together all the terms that were used in the literature and by my interlocutors to describe "white women": Western, white, and Caucasian. Yet, the woman in the resulting image was still very much an Asian woman, albeit with lighter skin color than the partner she was passionately kissing.

Then I had an idea. What if I tried the opposite? Perhaps this could give me an idea of whether the image generator worked or not. My prompt was: "Chinese woman with Western man" [Fig. 3]. Here again, the image depicted a visibly lighter-skinned Asian woman dressed in Chinese garb with a darker-skinned Asian man. The result was also not what I had expected. But then again "Western" could be an ambiguous term, interpreted as a man from Western China perhaps. Moreover, this time I had not inputted the adjective "white" for the woman, but she was still very pale.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Regardless, I decided to give it another try: "Chinese woman with white Caucasian man" [Fig. 4]. This time the image generator got it perfectly right. The man was tall, blonde, and pale-looking, the stereotypical white man that most people in China imagine when they think of foreigners. The woman next to him was a more petite Asian woman, and a traditional Chinese house stands in the background.

That worked within just two trials. Maybe I had found the formula. I decided to use the same exact prompt in reverse. Maybe the secret for success was to combine white and Caucasian: "Chinese man with white Caucasian woman" [Fig. 5]. Still nothing. Even after five or six more attempts, I continued to receive images of two Asian partners.

As I grew increasingly frustrated, I hypothesized that maybe something was just wrong with this particular AI model. I decided to try another image generator offered in the Poe app: *Playground-v2.5*. This time, based on my only "successful" attempt with the first bot, I began with the opposite combination: "Romantic interracial couple: white man, Chinese woman" [Fig. 6]. The prompt yielded an image that was immediately right, depicting a DiCaprio lookalike beside a Chinese woman wearing an upper garment with a "mandarin collar" and with her hair tied up in an elegant bun.

Once again, I inverted the prompt to seek the couple I was interested in: "Romantic interracial couple: white woman, Chinese man" [Fig. 7]. In this image, the woman was simply a variation of the previous one, while the man was indeed Chinese-looking. Clearly, something was wrong here, as two exactly symmetrical opposite combinations produced strikingly different results. This could not possibly be a coincidence, as it had been the case for both of the GenAI bots I had used. Moreover, the bug reflected the problems of media representation, where it is quite frequent to see a white protagonist engaged in some sort of intimate relationship with an Asian woman, whereas the opposite is far less common. Similarly, when couples such as the ones the bot could not seem to conceive are seen in public, their intimacy is not always acknowledged as a romantic involvement.[8] While in Hong Kong this might be less the case than elsewhere, such as in mainland China, some of my interlocutors did report similar incidents.

I kept trying with various prompts, and after six more attempts, I finally got something acceptable: "Romantic interracial couple: white woman, Chinese man – no Chinese woman" [Fig. 8]. At last, the woman looked like she could be a Western-white-Caucasian woman, and her partner indeed seemed Chinese. With both dressed elegantly, this was the symmetrically opposite image to the first one that this bot had generated.

By this point, I had already realized that this AI image-generating strategy was probably not going to work for my research. However, at this time I was also in the midst of writing my dissertation chapter on media representation and its impact on dating practices. As Gina Marchetti explains, Hollywood typically represents Asian men as evil or asexual, whereas Asian females are depicted as "sexually available to the white hero."[9] Far from solely remaining on-screen fantasies, these representations profoundly shape actual dating practices. As one of my interlocutors explained, as an Asian man you have to work significantly harder to have success on the dating market. Because the impact of these tools extend way beyond the frustrations of a researcher interacting with a screen, we must ask ourselves: Why is it then that GenAI struggles so much to generate the image of a Chinese man paired with a white woman? And how does this blockage reflect on our current society and dating lives?

The problem is not limited to using free (perhaps low-quality) image generators. Soon after my little experiment, I read about other tech news outlets identifying similar challenges and biases when using GenAI. Particularly, someone writing for *The Verge* ran into the same issue I had encountered using Meta's AI image generator, *Imagine*.[10] The tool kept representing couples with two Asian partners instead of an Asian male and white female as requested by the author's prompt, quite ironical for a tool called "*Imagine.*" The news soon caught the attention of other outlets, who also noticed that Meta's own CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, is married to a woman of East Asian heritage.[11]

However, we cannot simply blame Zuckerberg for this. While AI is an amazing technology and a promising tool that could make our lives easier, it comes with many problems and dangers not reducible to any particular CEO. The main problem with this technology is that AI models are fed and trained by humans, mainly middle-class white men. Therefore, as numerous observers have pointed out, AI technology works to reproduce and reinforce race, gender, and class biases and inequalities. In the realm of representation, despite partly successful calls for increased representation of diverse pairings in popular culture – which have gained some traction through (limited) inclusivity in casting and filmmaking, and phenomena like fan fiction and the rise of K-culture – AI biases reproduce the unimaginability of certain relationships. Just like movie productions or TV series, the challenges that people encounter with producing images representing less mainstream couples through GenAI contribute to rendering such couples invisible while also shaping dating practices and desires. The call for more accurate and equitable representations, then, cannot be limited to the big screens; it must also include these new technologies, and it must start now that they are beginning to gain popularity with the public. Today, the question that anthropologist Nicole Constable asked back in 2003 in her book *Romance on a Global Stage*[12] – "Why and for whom is it unimaginable?" ("it" being, in that study, American women looking for Asian husbands abroad) – has a new answer: it is unimaginable for AI because of its problematic training.

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Notes

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12 Constable, Nicole. 2003. *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and "Mail Order" Marriages.* Berkley: University of California Press.

Fig. 1 (far left): Bagamoyo's built – and problematic – heritage (clockwise): the Boma; the Old Fort; the principal mosque at Kaole; the Caravanserai. (Photos courtesy of *Bahari Yetu Urithi Wetu* Project, 2019-2020)

Fig. 2 (left): Bagamoyo's nautical heritage (clockwise): *ngalawa* fishing dugout under sail; the motorised *mtando*; *mashua* cargo vessels; a rare *mchoro*. (Photos courtesy of *Bahari Yetu Urithi Wetu* Project, 2019-2020)

Making Maritime Heritage

Grassroots Engagements in Bagamoyo, Tanzania

John P. Cooper and Elgidius B. Ichumbaki

All around the Indian Ocean littoral, coastal communities and those in the hinterlands find themselves at odds with official heritage narrations of the sea. Among the Arab Gulf states, for example, treatments of pearling and seafaring by big-budget museums erase communal diversities for the sake of unifying national mythologies. In India, just as the country's first national maritime museum is planned, Hindutva nationalism promotes a maritime heritage expressing a heroic and exclusively Hindu naval past. Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, coastal Tamil, Muslim, and Christian communities find themselves not only excluded from the government's Sinhala-Buddhist heritage-making, but sometimes also fearing eviction through the politicised use of archaeological designations. Can we – maritime archaeologists and heritage professionals with limited resources – find approaches that resist such top-down forms of heritage-making and serve the needs of local communities? In the Tanzanian coastal town of Bagamoyo, official heritage narratives are not so much hostile to the needs of the local community as tone-deaf to them.

In Bagamoyo, a nineteenth-century town of artisanal fishing people and traditional boatbuilders, official heritage designations centre very much on built structures – chiefly the many buildings in the central Conservation Area and, a little outside of town, the ruins at the Kaole Ruins archaeological site. This monument-based approach is a direct legacy of colonialism, with British imperial legislation persisting largely unchanged into the independence era. One result of this situation is that officially designated "heritage" mainly comprises buildings, such as the Customs House, the Old Post Office (fig. 1), and, on the outskirts of town, the Roman Catholic Church. Among these are monuments with deeply painful associations for local people: the Boma administrative building and the Old Fort are reminders of the brutalities of German and British imperialism, while the nearby caravanserai recalls the depredations of the Indian Ocean trade in enslaved people, as well as ivory.

Tensions are also evident at ostensibly more "neutral" archaeological sites, such as Kaole Ruins, the thirteenth-fifteenth-century Swahili site that lies some 5km down the coast from Bagamoyo. Here legal designations have placed barriers – literally – between local people and the site, hampering traditional relationships, including pilgrimage and other related ritual activities at the mosque on the site and its surrounding landscape. Unhappiness with existing policies among local people in the neighbouring village of Kaole has led to a conflictual relationship with the site's management, with residents periodically closing the road taking tourists to the site. Villagers have also communicated their discontent to the National Assembly through their Bagamoyo constituency representatives decrying how the government treats them in relation to the management of the site and the distribution of benefits from it.

In sharp contrast, the day-to-day breadwinning activities of people in Bagamoyo represent a wealth of maritime material culture and intangible heritage that operates entirely outside the purview of official heritage narratives and policy. The fishing and cargo-trading fleet alone represents a wealth of traditional wood-based boatbuilding and boat carving that few places around the Indian Ocean can today match. Unlike countries such as Sri Lanka and most of the Arabian Peninsula, fibreglass watercraft are few and far between. The artisanal fishing fleet includes four varieties of wooden log-boat, including the ubiquitous double-outrigger *ngalawa*, as well as several varieties of plank-built vessel, from the increasingly rare double-ended *mchoro* to the newly innovated *ngwanda* and *mtando* (Fig. 2). Relatively large plank-built cargo vessels such as the *mashua* also operate out of Bagamoyo, plying back and forth to the islands of the Zanzibar Archipelago. What is more, the great majority of these vessels rely on the sail, a propulsion technology that has entirely disappeared from much of the Indian Ocean periphery. But here, too, outboard motors are making inroads: the gradual disappearance of the *mchoro* reflects demand for hulls with transom sterns that can take motors; the newcomer *ngwanda* and *mtando* only use motors; and the larger *mashua* cargo craft alternate between motor and sail to optimise speed and costs in their crossings of the Zanzibar Channel.

Although immediately striking to the outside visitor, the watercraft of Bagamoyo are but one aspect of the town's maritime story. Underpinning their existence are a cohort of skilled carpenters and carvers whose technical knowledge and craft skills rest only within the mind-body complex of each practitioner. It is through them that the tradition and innovation in the wooden boat-building industry apparent in the Bagamoyo fleet are realised. Once built, the boats of Bagamoyo enable new forms of traditional and intangible knowledge – of seascapes and landmarks, of fishing grounds and weather, of sea states and season, of the behaviours of fish and the methods of catching.

Activity at sea is mirrored in activity on land, extending the maritime cultural landscape ashore. Bagamoyo's waterfront is shaped by conventional practice: the beach is where the catch is landed, traded, and descaled; above the high-water mark, operating boats are stored and repaired, and new ones are built (Fig. 3). Outside the colonial-era Customs House, porters load mainly timber and poles (Fig. 4) to the *mashua* for shipping to Zanzibar. At the same time, other porters unload canisters of cooking oil and other cargo from other *mashua* on the return journey. Along the waterfront, fish are cooked or loaded into trucks heading to consumers in Dar es Salaam and regions inland. Sardines are dried, nets laid out and repaired.

In the mangroves near Kaole Ruins, women gather fresh mangrove whelks which they use to prepare stew that they sell to tourists or ship home for domestic use. Elsewhere, men sit under baobab and other majestic trees making new *madema* (fish traps) and repair old ones, while telling stories about the sea and what it offers. Some 2.5 km north of Bagamoyo, coastal salt pans that have been operational for centuries continue to operate in the traditional manner. In the nearby streets and villages inland such as Kaole, Magomeni, Dunda, and Nianjema, one sees multiple houses with and surrounded by maritime paraphernalia: small boats, their masts and oars, fish traps and nets, and suchlike. Some houses have on their wall or doors colourful pictures and images that tell of people's relationships with the sea, such as boats, the coastal environment, and fish. Some streets have wooden signs that have been carved with similar maritime imagery. In one street, there are groups of men whose daily activity is to traditionally melt and weld metal to produce the nails used in the boats that are made along the shoreline.

To an outsider with no direct stake or interest in maritime heritage, Bagamoyo appears as something of a wonderland—part living museum, part repository of forms of artisanal knowledge that have vanished elsewhere. But not so for the practitioners

Fig. 3 (right): *Ngalawa* dugouts dominate the beach at Bagamoyo. (Photo courtesy of *Bahari Yetu Urithi Wetu* Project, 2019)

Fig. 4 (right): *Mashua* cargo vessels wait for the rising tide to sail for Zanzibar. (Photo courtesy of *Bahari Yetu Urithi Wetu* Project, 2019)

Fig. 5 (far right): Scenes from the 2020 *Bahari Yetu, Urithi Wetu* exhibition at the Boma building in Bagamoyo. (Photos courtesy of *Bahari Yetu Urithi Wetu* Project, 2020)

themselves. Challenging for us, as heritage practitioners seeking out engaging manifestations of cultural practice, people we polled told us that their most valued heritage was not a particular object or practice, but rather "the sea." Meanwhile, the state not only fails to recognise this maritime heritage – however it is conceived – but it also criminalises much of it through fisheries legislation, leading to periodic crackdowns and boat-burnings.

Running from 2019-2021, our *Bahari Yetu, Urithi Wetu* (Our Ocean, Our Heritage) project sought to explore the notion and utility of the maritime heritage concept through direct engagement with the Bagamoyo community. In many ways, our approach was ethnographically conventional: we met and interviewed people; we mapped the maritime cultural landscape; we documented and typologised material culture, particularly the watercraft. But our activities also took unexpected turns: a co-creative workshop at the beginning of our fieldwork gained us advocates who stayed with us throughout the project. A co-created community exhibition of material culture, historic photographs, and project-generated photography and video was, pleasingly, attended by more than 500 people including pupils from local schools (fig. 5). But what brought it alive was the way boatbuilders and fishers themselves stepped forward to showcase and interpret their boats and fishing gear to visitors. Meanwhile, the talents of University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) students afforded new means of promoting awareness. A music video featuring student Claudia Lubao (a.k.a. Chemical), alongside artists Innocent Omary (a.k.a. Centano) and Salum Bavuga (a.k.a. Honest), raised important issues through the popular *Bongo Flava* music genre. And a chance encounter with self-taught boat carver Mzee Alalae gave rise to a Swahili-language documentary film, made by our team members, that recorded his construction of a *ngalawa* (fig. 6).

Finally, we supported local boatbuilders in establishing a professional boatbuilding association, CHAMABOMA-Bagamoyo, which facilitates collaboration between builders, represents their interests, and promotes training opportunities for youngsters. As a male-only enterprise, CHAMABOA-Bagamoyo was an important addition to the WAUTO-Kaole women-only enterprise that UDSM and collaborator, the Escalla Initiative established in 2017 to support participation in coastal heritage protection alongside income-generating businesses. This gender symmetry acknowledges that both men and women can participate in the protection and preservation of coastal marine heritage while also earning income to improve their livelihoods.

Bahari Yetu, Urithi Wetu closed with a forum held on the UDSM campus that brought members of the Bagamoyo maritime community, policymakers, and academics face-to-face with representatives of various ocean-facing government agencies overseeing museums, antiquities, tourism, marine parks, fisheries, and forestry, as well as the Tanzanian National Commission for UNESCO. Alongside the forum, a UDSM Maritime Week recreated the Bagamoyo community exhibition, showed the documentary film, and engaged with national media. The project *ngalawa*, built by Mzee Alalae, was shipped from Bagamoyo to UDSM for the duration. It became a centre of attraction when visitors were given the opportunity to sign the sail (fig. 7) and so historicise their appreciation of the craftsmanship.

No matter how ambitious, a small project such as ours could not expect, on its own, to transform Tanzania's national maritime-heritage priorities to better reflect the perspectives of sea-facing communities such as Bagamoyo's. But it could – and did – celebrate their skills and livelihoods through ephemeral exhibitions, enduring digital media, and conventional academic publication. Time will tell whether these efforts contribute to a national reconceptualization of heritage and its protection. In the meantime, we take heart from the comment of one of our boatbuilder colleagues: "Since we took part in this project, people look at us differently. Before they barely noticed us on the beach. Now, we feel pride in what we do." And, as one visitor to the exhibition said: "The University of Dar es Salaam and its collaborators have shown us what conducting research for and with the community means. Visiting the exhibition, listening to the students' narrations about what you have achieved, and learning how to use different tools to make boats from the boat builders themselves is fantastic. Professors, students and the local people learning from each other and producing such an exhibition for us has been extremely wonderful."

Based on our experience during and after implementation of this project as well as the comments from hundreds of people who learned about the maritime heritage of Bagamoyo, a central question, "what next?" remains. What happens next is a question not only for us and our collaborators, but for everyone interested in maritime heritage and wishing to see coastal communities in the Indian Ocean World continue to celebrate their heritage while sustainably maintaining the livelihood opportunities offered by the sea. We therefore invite stakeholders interested in either collaborating or supporting our initiatives in Bagamoyo and elsewhere in the Indian Ocean World to reach out and engage. It will be through such collaborative efforts that initiatives to preserve maritime heritage thrive alongside sustainable livelihood options among coastal communities in Tanzania and beyond.

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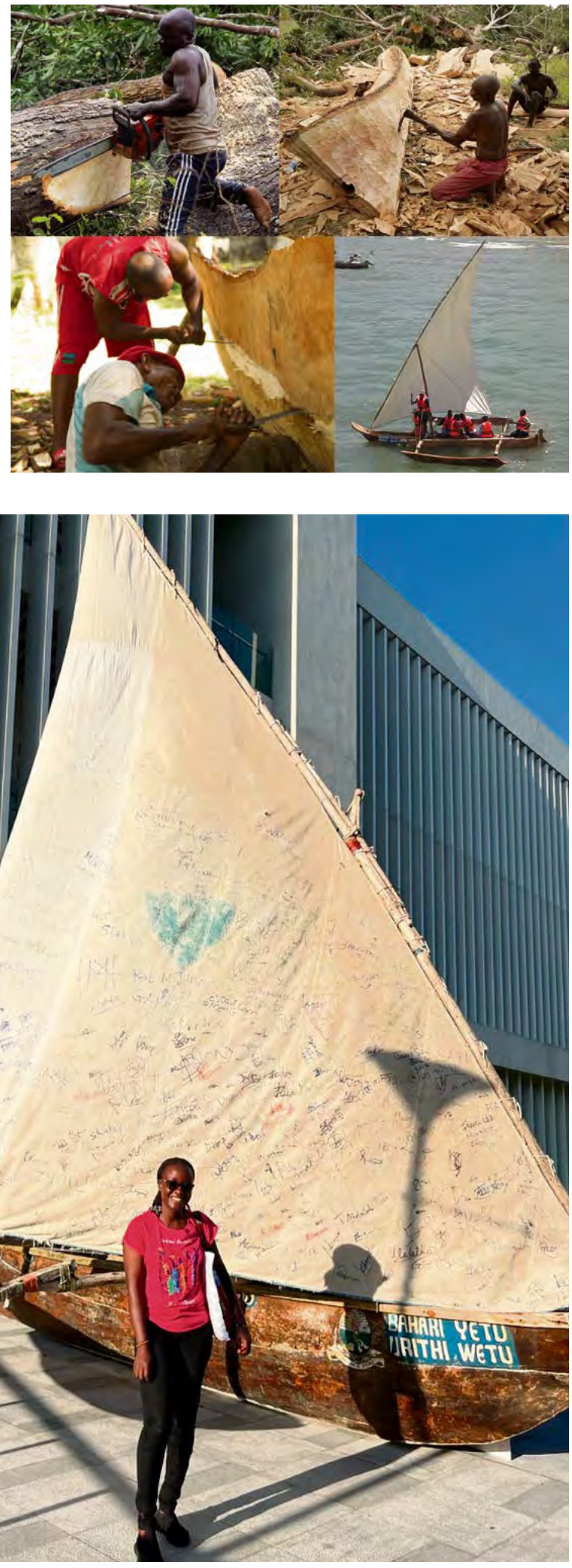

Fig. 6 (right): (right, clockwise): Mzee Alalae builds a *ngalawa:* rough-shaping the mango tree; shaping the hull with an adze; attaching an extension plank; the finished vessel under sail. (Photos courtesy of *Bahari Yetu Urithi Wetu* Project, 2021)

Fig. 7 (below): The Bahari Yetu Urithi Wetu ngalawa with its sail signed by some of the exhibition visitors at the University of Dar es Salaam ICHU: the signed sail. (Photo courtesy of *Bahari Yetu Urithi Wetu* Project, 2021)

The Antilibrary in the Pandemic

Sourav Chatterjee

For my spring break in March 2020, I travelled from New York City to Florida to visit my partner with a week's worth of clothes in a backpack. This was when I was a doctoral student at Columbia, working on South Asian literature and British imperialism. Little did I anticipate that that one week of spring break would extend, nearly unendingly, into two years and seven months, at the end of which I would not only survive a pandemic, a mighty hurricane, and a flood but also initiate The Antilibrarian Project on Instagram to commemorate the loss of the beloved paperbacks I would lose in the flood.

Fig. 1 (left): Stochastic Piles of Unread Books (Photo by author, 2021).
Fig. 2 (middle left): Flood after Hurricane Elsa (Photo by author, 2021).
Fig. 3 (above): Moldy books drying in the sun (Photo by author, 2021).

The day after I flew out of New York, the city was indefinitely locked down to maintain quarantine and contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Classes went online in late March, ushering in a sense of infinite space, time, and solitude without institutional obligations. No sooner had I settled into my partner's apartment than I started taking long walks to the ice cream shop and local bookstores, like 2nd & Charles and Books-a-Million, all masked up. Every time I left the house, I brought back at least eight to ten used and new books. I borrowed 15-20 books whenever my partner visited the university library. I carefully searched online for used books in my free time before placing bulk orders. I ordered mostly mass-market paperbacks from Penguin, Oxford UP, Bantam, Signet, Vintage, Tor, etc. Whatever came into the house was thoroughly sanitized with disinfectant wipes and dried in the sunlight before being handled and shelved – a process that I perfected to the point of efficiency over months.

Spring stretched out into an endless summer. People started dying from the virus. I lost two family members and a very close friend.

I bought books to forget that the usual routine of my life was disrupted. I also bought books to celebrate co-habiting with my partner indefinitely for the first time in our decade-long relationship. As I could not leave the house, I invited the world into our living room and onto our bookshelves. My partner thought of this as my period of adjustment and overlooked the three new bookshelves in the apartment double-stacked with used mass-market paperbacks and hardcopies at the beginning of the Summer of 2020. At this point, we stopped alphabetizing our bookshelves.

Groceries, a tub of chocolate ice cream, along with a package from Thrift Books – these were our weekly deliveries from May to October of 2020.

Hurricane Season

Around late summer – hurricane season in Florida – I diligently started following all the major literary awards besides the annual Nobel Prize in Literature. The raging thunderstorms from the hurricane made me so nostalgic about the Calcutta monsoon that I started collecting all contemporary "Winners" of major global literary prizes and awards. This dramatically increased my ever-growing personal collection of unread but "important" books.

In September, I started participating in the "Great Plague Texts" reading group with my friends. I ended up buying those books that were omnipresent on the internet: Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Camus' *The Plague*, Ma's *Severance*, Roth's *Nemesis*, Mann's *Death in Venice*, and Saramago's *Blindness*. The reading group ran for three weeks before getting disbanded by its founding members, who were suffering from excess sleep, restlessness, anxiety, and free time. More books started arriving at our doorsteps, and I got my first pair of prescription glasses. I felt like a real scholar, although the doctor said the excess ice cream might eventually affect my retina. But for the time being, there was nothing to worry about. Time was on my side.

Following the reading group's shutdown in October, under the influence of the Southern Gothic spookiness of a North Central Florida college town, I undertook a brand-new project of making a catalog of the most notoriously celebrated books on Occultism, Witchcraft, Satanism, Wicca, Magic, Goetia, Demonology, Spells, and Alchemy. By March 2021, I had acquired nearly seventy significant works on this literature, mostly from my partner's university library: de Spina, de Plancey, Nider, de Givry, Flamel, Paracelsus, Kramer, Levi, Michelet, Murray, Marwick, etc. We were both quite confounded to notice that a public school in a conservative "red state" would preserve such a fantastic collection of Occult literature. I read no more than three books to prepare myself for Halloween.

On All Hallow's Eve, I read Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* for the first time. From the novel, I took away that a) sugar *is* poisonous, so I should stop ordering ice cream every alternate day, and b) sugar *can* be poisoned; therefore, I shouldn't be eating so much ice cream.

Following a December visit to New York, during which we acquired still more books, our one-bedroom apartment in Florida ran out of space to store these "necessary" paperbacks. Empty floor space was already occupied with stacks of books (Fig. 1), which we used as coffee tables and footrests.

We transitioned from winter to spring to the summer of 2021 – hurricane season was upon us again. I bought very few books during those months. I was oversaturated. I lost two more family members. I ordered a copy of Fernanda Melchor's *Hurricane Season* to celebrate the arrival of this violent monsoon in a foreign land. By the middle of Melchor's book, I realized it had nothing to do with hurricanes or typhoons but with violence. Two days later, on 7 July, hurricane Elsa hit Florida in the morning and moved north and inland from the Gulf of Mexico. It rained all morning and afternoon. The tropical storm gradually became stronger in the evening. I was in the living room when water started filling our apartment from beneath the front door (Fig. 2).

The maintenance guy said that the two duck ponds adjacent to our apartment were flooded, which clogged the drains and caused the water to rise. We rushed to grab the books on the floor and throw them on the bed. The water inside the apartment rose quickly in ten minutes and flooded into the bedroom. Now, the water was up to our knees. It was not the filthy water that made us panic but the fear of snakes and baby gators that were notorious for infiltrating apartments during tropical floods. We grabbed our passports, immigration documents, laptops, and chargers and immediately evacuated the apartment, moving toward elevated ground. We left with our backpacks and a suitcase and stayed at a friend's house for a week.

A week after we left, the sunny third week of July – so sunny that last week's hurricane now felt like a distant dream – the apartment management informed us that the apartment was no longer habitable, so they would relocate us to a different apartment at a higher elevation. We returned to our flooded apartment to salvage our things. Management gave us two layers of industrial masks as a safety measure because black mold had appeared all over the apartment as the water dried. The manual workers who entered the apartment without masks developed allergies and infections, and management couldn't be sure whether the virus or the fungus had made them sick.

We found most of the electric sockets in the apartment damaged. The walls were damp and soggy, like a waffle ice cream cone. The bathtub was full of strange fauna and debris. We found a giant snail merrily lingering in it. All the books on the lower two shelves of the bookcases were damaged, moldy, and disintegrating. The cardboard box under the bed filled with dissertation notes, research materials, notepads, and paperbacks lay blasted open.

That evening, we threw nearly 200 books beyond repair and rescue into the dumpster. We tossed out the storage ottomans wholly submerged in water, two upholstered chairs, damp clothes in the closet, a faux-leather sofa, and most utensils under the kitchen sink. Our housing insurance did not cover "Act of God" events, meaning we had to rebuild our whole life from scratch.

After we relocated to the new apartment, we laid out approximately a hundred books

on the patio to dry them under the sun daily for a month (Fig. 3). We couldn't bring the books indoors because mold is airborne and easy to contract. If I fell sick, my university health insurance couldn't cover out-of-state medical costs, nor would my partner's health insurance have saved me because my partner was not my spouse. We were living in hell, in a moment of meta-paranoia. I was the most vulnerable person in the apartment, not immunologically but institutionally, infrastructurally, and legally.

By mid-August, I threw out sixty more books because the wet photo papers inside illustrated books were glued to one another and became one solid block of rock. The unpredictable showers in the mornings reversed the whole process of book restoration. By late August, we couldn't remember which books we had discarded during the relocation. We realized that some of the library books were now missing. The libraries asked us to replace the books if we didn't want to pay hefty fines. We started ordering books again online. Time was running in a circle.

The Antilibrarian Project

Around this time, I started clicking photos of all the books in the apartment to document the books we possessed – or that possessed us. Within two days, I took almost 2000 photos of individual books. The surest way to avoid running out of phone space was to upload the photos to an external cloud server like a social media account, albeit in lower resolution. As a result, I started "The Antilibrarian Project" (@antilibrarian) on Instagram.

The handle was inspired by Nassim Nicholas Taleb and Umberto Eco's concept of the "antilibrary," which refers to a personal collection of unread books. For me, the antilibrary is more than just stochastic piles of unread books. It contains books bought, gathered, borrowed without returning, gifted, returned to us, hoarded, stolen, smuggled, rescued, serendipitously found, received, inherited, and even dreamt. The antilibrary shares the most intimate spaces with us. It lives with us; we go to sleep in its ever-awaiting presence and, therefore, also make love, bare ourselves, and express our deepest, darkest emotions in its proximity (Fig. 4).

The antilibrary is also our personal *memento mori:* a constant reminder of the transience of life and the passage of time in the signs of the gathering dust. In its ever-growing, parasitic, and uncontrollable grotesqueness, the antilibrary is the microcosm that embodies a little bit of everything we ever want to know but will never come to know. The antilibrary is inextricably tied to the mortality of our flesh and intellect (Fig. 5).

Being an immigrant in someone else's country, the antilibrary is a perpetual reminder of my rootlessness and peripatetic lifestyle because I have to move with my antilibrary from one apartment to another every two years. Our rate of accumulating/hoarding/collecting books will always surpass our rate of reading them, which is the foundational principle of the physical and digital antilibraries. The antilibrary highlights the constraints and priorities of our existence on this planet: linguistic (because our antilibraries are translationally streamlined), archival (because thousands of years of esoteric commentaries on liturgy, orthopraxy, adoxography, and hagiographic accounts belong to an actual library being out of print), disciplinary (comprehensive literature on limnology and golf course management is missing in my antilibrary), ideological (there are texts we would never keep in our possession even if we have read them), and corporeal (my grandmother often wished for a third prosthetic hand because one was employed in holding the book and the other a magnifying glass). AI, machine learning, cloud servers, or hard drive space – where digitized books can be stored and sifted through in seconds – cannot boast of possessing antilibraries since they cannot help but read/skim/search through every digitized word and sign system on this planet. Machines are not cursed with human constraints.

Fig. 4: A Window of Books (Photo by author, 2021).

I initially used The Antilibrarian Project to upload or "dump" photos of stacks of books to keep track of what I was buying. I was completely unaware of the ethics of operating a public social media profile. As I started spending more time on the platform, the global community of the so-called "bookstagrammers" (Book-Instagrammers) became visible to me through the vibrant networks of "Followers," "Followings," and "Suggested" accounts as well as through the user-generated cross-referencing hashtags (#) for the latest trending topics. Bookstagram is a space on Instagram that is algorithmically curated and produced by users interested in books and their manifold functions. This space promotes non-specialized and non-academic perceptions of the broadly conceived world literature – literature of the world and the world of literature. On the platform, exchanging ideas among diverse accounts is encouraged and cherished rather than shunned for being dilettantish.

During my first month on the platform, I posted photos of a literary text with a short caption describing the text's overarching themes and storyline. The posts didn't garner much attention due to the nascency of the account. As days passed, I started experimenting with the frequency of my posts, the camera's lighting, contrast, highlights, saturation, depth, and the background against which books were photographed. I realized that the way a user treated these different elements of composition produced various bookstagram aesthetics, genres, and sensibilities:"dark academia," "light academia," "cottagecore," "vintagecore," "petcore," "leisurecore," "boomercore," "cafécore," etc. This is where bookstagram brings together fashion, architecture, travel, interior decoration, political intellectualism, activism, promotion of local booksellers and bookstores, cultural prejudices, and social aspirations. Posing with Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* in Sleepy Hollow in the Fall is "way cooler" than posing with it in the historic NYPL because books on social media are everyday commodities tied to aspirational lifestyle identities. One only needs to look to the nearly concurrent rise of "book stylists" and celebrity sightings including Bella Hadid carrying Camus's *The Stranger* and her sister Gigi Hadid with King's *The Outsider*. Books, the zeitgeist had declared, were the new "it" fashion accessory.

This superficial relationship to the medium of the book came with its unique faux pas and absurdities. I saw a user pose with Woolf's *Orlando* in Orlando, Florida, thinking the novel was about that place. The second user expressed excitement over gifting Morrison's *Beloved* to their beloved partner on their first anniversary as a token of unshakable love. The third user posed with Gordimer's *July's People* on a blue summer beach in July and posted a caption that more or less said: "Haters will always hate the people of July! Move on, haters!"

Adventures in the Bookstagram Wonderland

After three years of collaborating and engaging with other bookstagrammers, I observed a few critical things that we must urgently address if we want to revivify and expand humanities and liberal arts education worldwide:

1. The Demographic Expectations: My captions on canonical texts – from Homer to Tranströmer – had only a niche audience among users aged thirty and above. Posts from this demographic showed users' nostalgic memories of reading these texts in the last century. The users below thirty responded to these posts with: "Adding this to my TBR (To be read) list." Clearly, they – from humanities academics, general non-academics, and non-humanities academics – considered reading canonical Global North texts aspirational but had no time to read them.
2. The Role of Online Book Clubs: Significantly popular bookstagram accounts and online book clubs (like Reese Witherspoon's book club @reesesbookclub, Kaia Gerber's book club @libraryscience, and Oprah's Book Club @oprahsbookclub) focus more on acquiring or buying books, not their actual circulation through libraries or lending systems. Public engagement in the book club format is created through a series of questions posed by the creator at the end of the 90-second-long reels, which persuade viewers to get a copy of their own.
3. Curation and Politics: Bookstagram accounts do not only orchestrate the aesthetics of a physical antilibrary (like Gwyneth Paltrow's recruitment of a "book curator" to decorate her house, as reported in *The Town & Country* magazine in 2019) but also create global subscriptions to particular political affiliations. For example, in May 2024, Ben Affleck's daughter, Violet Affleck, was photographed by paparazzi walking with Steven Thrasher's *The Viral Underclass.* The high schooler's gesture soon became a commentary on mask mandates and our handling of the pandemic, as well as her political investments in issues like the genocide in Palestine, as reported by *The Cut* magazine.
4. The Aesthetic Appeal: The book covers' hijacking of mobile and laptop screensavers, wallpapers, display photos, and other mood boards on different social media platforms (e.g., *Pinterest*, *Threads*, or *X*) through "crossposting" features is a quintessential aspect of reading in the twenty-first century. Photos of casual stacks of books lying around enjoy the privilege of enhanced engagement.
5. The Dominance of Global North Authors: Posting about prominent authors from the Global South still does not garner much traction and engagement as opposed to major and minor writers from the Global North, as literature in English is still the gold standard that determines shares, comments, likes, and reposts.
6. Thin Fictions: There is a growing preference among users for sharing and promoting "thin fictions," which has bigger fonts and are less than two hundred pages, like the works of Claire Keegan, Eva Baltasar, Annie Ernaux, Hiroko Oyamada, Alejandro Zambra, etc. Anything around or less than a hundred pages is called "wafer-thin fiction," like Handke's *The Left-Handed Women*, Forster's *The Machine Stops*, Bellow's *The Actual*, Tsushima's *Territory of Light*, and more. Wafer-thin fiction has made narrative ever more bite-sized and easy to devour.
7. Cats, Cafés, and Bookshops: Contemporary writings on cats, cafés and diners, and bookshops and libraries have a significant circulation on the Instagram algorithm. Contemporary Japanese authors mostly dominate this literature like Kawamura's *If Cat Disappeared from the World*, Akiwai's *The Travelling Cat Chronicles*, Hiraide's *The Guess Cat*, Kawaguchi's *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* series, Natsukawa's *The Cat Who Saved Books*, Yagisawa's *The Morisaki Bookshop* series, Kashiwai's *Komogawa Food Detective* series, Murakami's *The Strange Libary*, Aoyama's *What you are looking for is in the library*, etc. These narratives are appealing not only because they are slim volumes but because their rhetorical style is light and lucid, where the atmosphere and tone shift from gloomy, cozy, and snowy to fantastical. After all, cats in their manifold avatars – real life, representation, or prop – do wonders for the bookstagram algorithm!

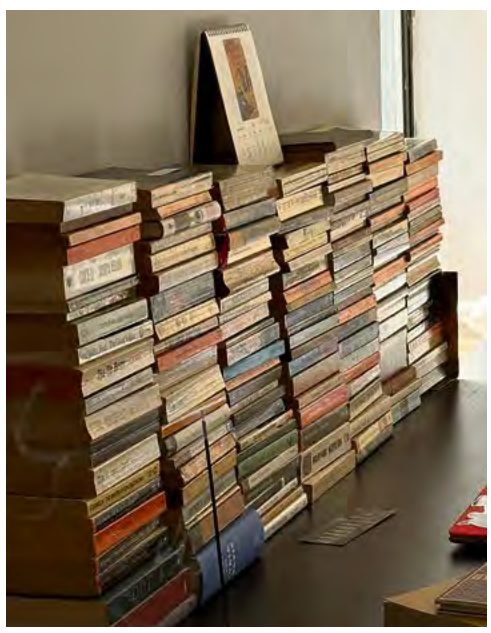

Fig. 5: Stacks of mass-market paperbacks on the writing desk (Photo by author, 2024).

Literary appreciation and aesthetic judgment have significantly shifted in the post-Covid pandemic world. The reading communities on social media exist simultaneously and *contiguously* with academia's solitary reading spaces and practices. Their mutual symbiosis can no longer be ignored. Online reading communities are close to shaping university and college curricula, syllabi, canons, and disciplines. In the face of immense denigration and global defunding of liberal arts and humanities, we must radically consider these social media reading spaces where a book post can go viral across a worldwide community of readers in hours with the correct algorithm and caption hook. Teachers and academics will find it helpful to tap into this tentacular arachnid network of global reading communities on Instagram or TikTok and incorporate alternate systems of engagement to reanimate university course curricula and assignments. We must *re-imagine* traditions and canons of literature backward (if there are canons at all anymore) – paying more attention to social media, the post-pandemic generation of students, contemporary literary publications, online reading communities, and the dynamic technological and material infrastructures within which acts of reading become possible and political.

The Antilibrarian Project now has more than 27k+ followers, with posts occasionally going viral with half a million views. Through the engagement metric and account visibility, I regularly receive advance review copies from major publishers like Norton, Simon & Schuster, Viking, McSweeney's, Scribner, Europa, Bloomsbury, Scribe, and more. This project is rooted in Instagram's accessible interface and preference for the imagistic over the textual, through which the media application still retains a global fondness and aesthetic appeal for still pictures and moving images as dominant modes of communication. In the future, if Instagram and other such social media become obsolete, we will always have our antilibraries – the testaments to our collective curiosity and madness – which are infinite, inexorable, and parasitic because they are bound to take over our lives, and I believe we should let them, as they give purpose and legacy to our hoarding books.

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Academic Initiatives for Social Change through the Beautiful Game

A Masteral Catalyst to Formation of Ghana's Gold City Football Club

Joanna Masangkay

In 2022, Kente Kufour and his peers in the MSc Football Business program at a sports-focused university shared a common aspiration: to engage with the dynamic and profitable world of football, colloquially referred as 'the beautiful game.' Their ambition was not merely to observe from the sidelines but to actively participate and carve out their own niche within this rapidly expanding industry, which has been experiencing a remarkable surge in investment and financial growth. This raised a question: Is it possible for educators to instil the need to drive community impact in their students' future work?

Gold City Football Club, a Ghanaian third-division football club founded in 2023, and born out of academic discourse, has become a professional club with community impact in its core. This article seeks to inspire and promote the ongoing effort to create an impact through pedagogical methods. It underscores the critical role of crafting educational modules that encourage community participation, establishing meaningful partnerships between academic institutions and local organisations, and particularly developing business modules that look beyond just the bottom-line. By enriching the educational process, students are more likely to experience meaningful learning that can lead to positive outcomes. This pedagogical strategy enhances learners' comprehension and sensitivity towards societal challenges, while also fostering a lasting positive influence.

Educators possess a unique privilege to influence their students' outlook on the significance of community engagement and impact. By integrating real-world examples and community-focused projects into their modules, they can ignite a spark in their students to consider the broader implications of their scholarly endeavours, beyond standard assessments, dissertations, or report submissions. Take Kente, for instance, a mentee under the author's guidance for his master's thesis and a participant in the author's courses on Research Methods and Football Finance. The path traversed by Kente and his colleagues in the postgraduate degree (MSc) in Football Business exemplifies the conversion of scholastic theories into actionable ventures. Kente and his peers' journey in the MSc Football Business program is a testament to how academic insights can be translated into practical initiatives. In recent years, the role of sports in fostering social change has gained significant recognition. This article narrates how scholarly projects can act as a catalyst for driving societal progress, spotlighting the establishment of Gold City Football Club in Ghana, an initiative that originated from a master's thesis. This narrative is also backdropped against the author's unlikely story: the intriguing development of a Filipino-Australian academic becoming the CEO of a Ghanaian third-division football club.

Football is seen to have the ability to transcend cultural and social barriers, uniting people from diverse backgrounds. The concept of using academic projects to drive community development is not new, but its application in the realm of sports, particularly football, presents a relatively novel approach. This article explores one of the cases in which the potential of higher education to inspire students to contribute positively to society is realised. Moreover, this article is clearly not just about football or sports; it is about harnessing academia's potential to drive forward progressive social agendas. It challenges traditional notions about the role universities play within their communities.

Fig. 2 (above): GCFC Founder and the team in Accra, Ghana, October 2024. (Photo by William Seshie, courtesy of GCFC, 2024)

Fig. 3 (right): Snap from GCFC "Justify" try-outs for the team. (Photo by William Seshie, courtesy of GCFC, 2024)

Kente's applied research project

Kente pursued his postgraduate studies at a university uniquely dedicated to the business of football, nestled within the iconic Wembley Stadium in London – the home of English national football teams. It was here that the paths of the author and the future founder of a Ghanaian football club converged. As a student, Kente engaged in the author's Football Finance and Research Methods sessions and was also under the author's supervision for his applied research project.

For his postgraduate research project, Kente studied the phenomenon of young African football players, particularly in Ghana, and the complexities surrounding their migration stories. His field work delves into the viewpoints of key stakeholders regarding the trend of promising young African footballers aspiring to play in Europe. Entities such as the Ghana Football Association, club owners, coaches, football agents, legal advisors, Ghanaian professional football players, and local football academies (particularly in Accra, Ghana), were integral to this study. It explored the underlying reasons prompting these athletes to seek careers in European leagues. Additionally, an analysis of Ghana's football scene provides context, examining how infrastructure, coaching quality, financial aspects, and league competitiveness influence migration choices. Current studies of sports migration reveal a particular pattern, especially among male athletes engaged in high-profile sports such as football, from peripheral nations to European countries where there is substantial financial support for the sport. Kente's findings aligned with existing literature and also shed light on the intricate web of issues and obstacles that migrating athletes encounter.

Kente's research work highlighted how the majority of stakeholders, particularly the young players, believe that migration enhances their development and exposure to higher levels of competition, effectively advancing their career. The research also underscores the pivotal support local communities offer to these athletes during the migration journey, with a call to strengthen existing support frameworks. The concerns for exploitation of these young athletes were also raised. Some stakeholders advocate for greater investment in educational and vocational opportunities for young players, emphasising the need for holistic support beyond football training. The unanimous view among Kente's interviewees is that educational and vocational assistance is crucial for the athletes' enduring success, providing them with the tools to thrive beyond their sporting careers. The perceived local economic benefits derived from such migrations, notably when players are transferred to European clubs, are significant and warrant attention. The creation of GCFC is a strategic response to these challenges, embodying the ethos of contributing positively to the founder's home community.

Through his fieldwork, Kente gained a deeper insight into the multifaceted challenges of football player migration in Ghana, as well as a broader appreciation for the diverse perspectives on the sport held by various local stakeholders. In Ghana, as in many other developing nations, the populace grapples with a host of social dilemmas such as youth unemployment, a scarcity of recreational amenities, and scant opportunities for community involvement. Being closely exposed to these issues fostered a sense of empathy in Kente, sparking his curiosity about potential solutions to these pervasive problems. Football clubs offer a regimented setting that nurtures young people, instilling values of teamwork, discipline, and a sense of communal pride.

As part of the masteral programme, the students complete an applied research project, offering an opportunity to apply theoretical learnings to real-world problems. These projects can also serve as incubators for innovative solutions to address societal issues. The inception of Gold City Football Club emerged from Kente's master's thesis, with the objective of harnessing the unifying force of sports to catalyse community development and engender social transformation.

Fig. 1: Gold City Football Club crest, a Ghanaian third-division football club founded in 2023.

Fig. 4: Medical screening for team players. (Photo by William Seshie, courtesy of GCFC, 2024)

Knowledge in Action

The narrative of Gold City Football Club is one of inspiration, a narrative that underscores the profound influence that academic endeavours can have when aligned with the passion and power of sport. This ongoing story is marked by every goal and every match, each adding to a growing legacy of transformation that reaches beyond the field and touches the lives of the local community members. It's about building a lasting legacy that extends far beyond the boundaries of the football field.

The shared ambition within Kente's postgraduate cohort mirrors a wider trend where the enticing economic prospects of football inspire participation and contributions to its growth. Many students specialising in Football Business aspire to be agents after their studies, motivated by the chance to tap into the sport's lucrative market. In this vein, the Gold City Football Club in Ghana emerged from this entrepreneurial drive. It not only reflects the enterprising nature of the academic community but also acts as a catalyst for social change through sports. The club's creation is a powerful example of how football can drive societal progress and community building, aligning with educational goals to harness the sport for the public good. Gold City Football Club's establishment goes beyond being a mere entity; it's part of a broader quest for social reform through football's global appeal. This endeavour marries scholarly concepts with real-world practice, blending business acumen with core values like teamwork, leadership, and civic duty. The club's inception signifies a shift in sports education, where football studies go beyond theory to engage with the sport's concrete, impactful facets. It embodies a recognition of football's capacity to not just entertain but also as a vehicle for meaningful social change.

The club proudly holds certification from the United Nations' Football for the Goals initiative, affirming its dedication to the Sustainable Development Goals. Management is committed to providing staff with fair wages and fostering career opportunities for players beyond the field, including a range of training programs. Additionally, the club prioritises the mental and physical health of its players. alongside improving their football abilities.

Establishing Gold City Football Club

Gold City Football Club (GCFC) is dedicated to creating opportunities for young people to engage in sports, advocating for health and wellness, and cultivating a strong community spirit. Despite the considerable promise for beneficial outcomes, the club faces typical grassroots challenges such as obtaining financial support, complying with local regulations, and sustaining community-centred initiatives over time. Nevertheless, these hurdles also offer a chance to innovate and expand, ensuring that the club not only survives but thrives in its mission.

The inception of the GCFC heralded a new era in Ghanaian football, as the clubs' founders actively forged partnerships within the local communities, aligning with individuals who shared the vision of nurturing homegrown talent. The recruitment strategy focused on enlisting players predominantly from underprivileged backgrounds, offering them chances they might not otherwise encounter to hone their football skills and join an academy. The club organised "Justify" try-out sessions, targeting male youth in Accra and its surrounding areas, recognising football's role as a conduit for social mobility. These try-outs drew numerous aspirants, all vying for a coveted place in the GCFC first team, with the majority of these players concurrently pursuing their high school education.

The allure of the Justify sessions extended beyond the pitch, as participants were eager to integrate into a team that provided not just a spot on the roster but a comprehensive support system. This included player accommodations (through the GCFC club house), professional training and development programs led by certified coaches, welfare and well-being support staff, and a dedicated team cook overseeing their dietary needs. Such provisions set GCFC apart from other local youth football academies, offering a holistic approach to player development both on and off the field. This unique model underscores GCFC's commitment to not only fostering athletic prowess but also supporting the overall growth and well-being of its players.

At the heart of Gold City FC's philosophy lies a belief in the power of football to transcend cultural barriers, unite communities, and inspire positive change. With each match, training session, and interaction, the club strives to embody the spirit of Ghana and celebrate its rich heritage on the global stage. By focusing on holistic player development, the club not only aims to produce skilled athletes but also well-rounded individuals who can contribute positively to society.

GCFC Players' Experience

The intended societal impact can perhaps be mostly observed through the players' perspectives. As the CEO of the club, the author met with the head coach (Gideon) and the team's captains, Victor and Michael. A central theme in the discussion is the ambition of the players to excel in football and their commitment to personal development. Victor, the captain, articulates a clear desire to achieve success with Gold City, emphasising that while they have not yet reached their goals, he is confident in their potential. For instance, Gideon states, "We may not have won the championship yet, but I believe we have the talent and determination to get there." This sentiment reflects a collective aspiration among the players to rise through the ranks and achieve recognition, showcasing their dedication to improving their skills. Gideon and both players express a strong commitment to their personal growth, indicating that their ambitions are not solely focused on individual accolades but are also intertwined with their journey towards professional football.

Football emerges as a profound passion for both staff and players, serving as a source of fulfillment and identity. They describe football not just as a sport but as a vital part of their lives, one that brings joy and purpose. One of the young players excitedly shared during a team call, "Football is my life; it's what I wake up for every day," highlighting the emotional and psychological significance of the sport. Michael, another player, stated that football is "not just a game, but a dream that I've chased my whole life." Their reflections underscore how football serves as a vehicle for self-expression and personal achievement, framing it as a means to attain happiness and fulfillment.

A theme highlighted in the conversation with players is the robust support system provided by the Gold City Football Club. Players like Michael and Victor emphasised the importance of both on-pitch and off-pitch support, highlighting how coaches and administrators offer guidance that extends beyond football. Victor mentioned, "The club has been there for us in every way, from training to providing for our basic needs, including regular medical screenings." Such support allows players to focus on their performance without the distraction of financial struggles. This acknowledgment underscores the club's commitment to fostering a nurturing environment for its athletes, which is crucial for their development and success.

Another interesting topic of discussion is the players' recognition of the broader impact of their football careers on their families and communities. Both Victor and Michael articulate a desire to uplift their families and contribute positively to their communities through their success in football. Victor expresses this responsibility by *saying*, "Every time I step on the pitch, I think about my family and how my success can change their lives." This highlights the interconnectedness of individual aspirations with communal well-being, illustrating how the players' dreams extend beyond personal success to encompass a desire to effect change in their environments. Michael adds, "I want to be a role model for the kids in my neighbourhood, showing them that they can achieve their dreams too." The dialogue between the CEO and the players also revealed a strong awareness of the community impact that football can have. Players and coaches alike recognise that their success can inspire and uplift their families and communities. Gideon articulates this by saying, "When we win, it's not just for us; it's for everyone who supports us." This theme of community engagement highlights the broader social responsibility that comes with being part of a sports organisation. The players' aspirations to contribute positively to their communities through their football careers reflect a deep understanding of the role that sports can play in societal development, reinforcing the idea that their achievements can lead to positive change.

GCFC is just one story ...

The narrative of Gold City Football Club is just unfolding, yet its influence is already evident in the young talents it has nurtured and the team it has inspired. Originating from scholarly discussions, the club's inception has not only sparked enthusiasm for the sport within Accra's community but has also been a benefit for local employment. While currently focusing on male youth, the club is actively working towards launching a parallel program for young women. It is noteworthy that the club's leadership reflects diversity and a shared zeal for football, with key positions held by women: the chairperson, CEO, and sports director. Gold City Football Club, born from a master's thesis, harnesses the power of sports to catalyse community growth in Ghana. The club's core aim is to engage the youth, advocate for healthy living, and cultivate a strong community spirit. This club's journey exemplifies the potential of academic projects to transcend scholarly boundaries and make a tangible difference in society.[1]

Fig. 5 (right): First Aid Training for GCFC players and staff. (Photo by William Seshie, courtesy of GCFC, 2024)

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Notes

1 The author acknowledges participants from Gold City Football Club: staff and players who shared their stories. More importantly, the author thanks the founders of the club, Kente Kufour and his wife Dr. Sandra Bediako, for inviting the author to be part of this journey.

Repurposing Phnom Penh

An Interdisciplinary Framework for Archive-Based Education and Intervention in Cambodia

Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier

Fig. 1 (left): Group formation at RUFA on the first day. (Photo courtesy of the author, 2024)

Since its independence from the French colonial power in 1953, Cambodia has experienced decades of turmoil and transformation. War, political transition, and reconstruction have left their imprint on the landscape, particularly in the capital Phnom Penh. Yet, the question arises of what remains of these traces today as the city's rapid growth results in limited heritage preservation. What role do archives play in this context of fast-paced urbanization? Can they become a 'field of intervention' for young Cambodians? If so, what types of archives are we talking about? The workshop "Repurposing Phnom Penh" sought to answer these questions and, in the process, address the broader theme of the 'archive' (as institution, collection, and praxis) in Cambodia. It took place in Phnom Penh in September 2024 with a group of students from different disciplinary backgrounds. The workshop aimed to show that archives do not only contribute to a better understanding of the past. They may also enhance citizen participation in contemporary issues such as urban planning.

As in other countries that went through long periods of conflict and destruction, the 'archive' has been an ongoing topic in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia. The first institutional attempts to recover or preserve devastated collections, produce new records, and train staff occurred in the 1980s. New types of institutions emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, in the wake of the 1992–1993 UN mission in Cambodia (UNTAC) and the country's democratic transition. The Center for Khmer Studies (CKS), the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), and Bophana Center for Audiovisual Resources, to name but the major ones, reshaped the archival landscape. However, while they have made collections more easily accessible to the public, bringing young Cambodians to archives remains a challenge to this day.

Against this backdrop, the workshop tried to develop interdisciplinary pedagogies that would help students become more familiar with archive institutions in Phnom Penh and also become more autonomous in their future research projects. "Repurposing Phnom Penh: Built Forms and Infrastructures as Archive" (hereafter RPPP) was developed with CKS in partnership with the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) and Bophana Center.[1] It proposed to explore Phnom Penh's urban history with a focus on the repurposing (or re-use) of the city's buildings and infrastructures from the mid-1950s to the mid-1990s. The concept was elaborated by myself (CKS Senior Fellow) with artists and curators Vuth Lyno and Khvay Samnang, whose work has long addressed urban life, architectural heritage, and the effects of development on cities and communities. This core group of facilitators was joined by anthropologist Anne-Laure Porée (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales or EHESS, France).

By investigating what was or wasn't built, what was or wasn't re-used by a broad range of actors such as governments, communities, NGOs, and individuals, and what has survived and how in the present-day cityscape, we wanted to produce a bottom-up, socio-material 'portrait' of Phnom Penh and its residents over 40 years. The precariousness of the city's tangible and intangible heritage (buildings, lifestyles, and ecosystems) motivated our choice of this urban lens. We thought it made archives all the more significant and could foreground the idea that, far from being a thing of the past, archives can foster critical engagement with the present.

Our objective was to stimulate the students' critical appropriation of materials and get them used to working with an 'expanded' archive including textual, audio-visual, and material sources. We organized RPPP's hands-on activities around a concrete goal: the creation of group projects about Phnom Penh. These projects were to be presented to the public at Bophana Center on the last day of the workshop. They could take any form – photo, performance, video, sound piece, installation, object, or social media piece – as long as they used the resources explored during the workshop and were produced within RPPP's time and budget constraints.

RPPP took place in Phnom Penh between 10 and 14 September 2024 at RUFA and Bophana Center. We were aware that a sprint workshop might be too short given the program we had designed. Yet, we thought that an intensive experience could be transformative for the students – and for ourselves. We also made it clear from the start that RPPP was experimental, without any guarantee of 'successful' outcome since its aim was to develop pedagogies.

The workshop was held in Khmer, with occasional interactions and interventions in English. On the first day, we introduced the themes and objectives. Lyno and Samnang presented their work to give the students examples of what we had in mind. After that, we proceeded to group formation. We had selected 20 students from different universities and with different disciplinary backgrounds (architecture, archeology, fine arts, and engineering). The group was homogenous in terms of age (20–23), and it had a good gender balance. We thought it was best to let the students self-organize with little prompt from our side. We only asked them to use two Post-it notes, a yellow one where they had to write their main skills and a green one where they wrote their main interests. After sticking these on their chests, we invited them to stand in the middle of the room so that they could move, read the information, talk, and finally assemble according to skill complementarity and affinities [Fig. 1]. This social aspect was essential. Prior to the workshop, the students had never met, but they quickly bonded and formed friendships, which we hoped would become the basis for future collaborations between them.

The workshop alternated between studio work and trips to archive institutions. We visited the Khmer Press Agency (AKP) at the Ministry of Information, the National Archives, and Bophana Center. As agreed with these institutions, each participant could choose up to two items in the collections for their group project. This stimulated exchanges within the groups. The AKP was particularly interesting for the students, as many did not know that such an archive existed. The photographic collection gave them unique insights into

Fig. 2 (left): Visit at the AKP archive. (Photo courtesy of the author, 2024)
Fig. 3 (above): Cleaning of documents at the National Archives. (Photo courtesy of the author, 2024)
Fig. 4 (right): Pasteur Institute. (Photo courtesy of the author, 2024)

Living Facades

Siborey Sean, Rattanakpisal Tan, Sokchoung Lim, and Sreyneang Chheng

Our project explored the evolution of Phnom Penh's iconic shop-houses in response to changes in Cambodia since the country's independence [Fig. 5]. Shophouses are a distinct feature of Southeast Asian urban architecture. They are not unique to Cambodia and can be found in countries like Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia as well. Originally designed as multipurpose spaces for living and commerce, these structures reflect a rich history of cultural exchange and colonial influences. In Phnom Penh, shophouses have undergone dramatic transformations, particularly in their facades. Over time, these facades have been adapted and modified to reflect shifting economic conditions, cultural practices, and personal tastes, from vibrant signboards and modern materials to improvised extensions and additions. We decided to create an interactive model showcasing these changes and invite the public to engage with them. The use of cutouts depicting facades, people, objects, boards, and plants allowed the visitors to actively 'remodel' the shophouses and, in the process, become virtual homeowners reimagining their environment. Gamification was central to our project. It encouraged playful exploration while fostering a deeper understanding of the ongoing adaptation of urban living spaces. Public reactions were positive. Many visitors expressed their newfound appreciation for the resilience and creativity inherent in Phnom Penh's cityscape. Some people shared personal experiences and insights which highlighted their emotional and cultural connections with these spaces. Our interactive model worked as both an educational tool and a mirror for societal transformations. It revealed how, through their houses, people perceive and adapt to challenges such as crises, economic booms, and ideological shifts. This underlined the importance of documenting these changes as part of Phnom Penh's living history.

Fig. 5 (left): Living Facades (Photo courtesy of the "Living Facades" team, 2024)

Cambodia's reconstruction since 1979 [Fig. 2]. At the National Archives, the students were introduced to the institution's history and collections. They observed how the staff members clean the documents [Fig. 3]. They also visited the upper floors and thus understood better the structure of this French colonial-era building (1926). At the two sites, the students met elderly archivists who have worked in these institutions for decades and could tell many stories. These encounters were, for both sides, an important moment of transgenerational transmission.

The program included site visits as well. We first saw two French colonial-era buildings on the Post Office square (1894). One now houses a restaurant; the other, bought by a developer, is fenced and, for the moment, left to rot. On Lyno's suggestion, we went to the former Pasteur Institute located in Chroy Changvar, on the outskirts of Phnom Penh [Fig. 4]. This veterinary hospital, a concrete three-story building, was designed by architect Vann Molyvann (1926–2017) in the mid-1960s. It is a good example of "New Khmer Architecture," the hallmark of Cambodia's post-independence modernization. Abandoned during the Khmer Rouge period, it was re-occupied as housing after 1979. This community (mostly people with low-income jobs) has remained there. Our guide was dancer and choreographer Nget Rady, who has been living in the building since his parents settled there in the 1980s. The Pasteur Institute and its residents are now threatened by development. From the rooftop, it is possible to see the advance of high-rises encroaching from all directions.

The last stop was Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (TSGM). Between 1975 and 1979, the Khmer Rouge had used these school buildings as a prison under the codename S-21. In 1979, the new authorities converted the site into a memorial museum. Anne-Laure, an expert on S-21, was our guide for the visit. We started with the 3D map of S-21 to show the students the prison's actual size and configuration (beyond the museum's five buildings) and the transformation of the neighborhood over time, as buildings have been reclaimed for housing and commercial purposes. The second part of the visit focused on the role of the museum's photo archive in research and exhibitions. Anne-Laure explained to the students how the TSGM staff had used details

Echoes of the Water

Taing Chongsan, Top Viphallin, Lay Chariya, and Keo Chhornlyly

Our project examined community spaces along the Phnom Penh riverside. It sought to highlight the tension between urban development and traditional fishing practices. The idea came from the archive materials we discovered during the workshop, especially the 1957 footage "Fishing in Cambodia" (Bophana Center). We were struck by the traditional structures fishermen used to dry their nets, and by the communal spaces where they gathered. Many of these traditional activities have now disappeared from the cityscape, supposedly because of hygiene and safety issues. Of course, this footage portrays a romanticized view of riverside fishing. It overlooks fishermen's physical exertion and economic uncertainty, or the environmental risks. Yet, it also celebrates their sense of community and resourcefulness. We wanted to revive these memories of traditional fishing practices while commenting on the effect of urban development on communal spaces.

We first thought about building small-scale models that would reproduce these spaces. In the end, we decided to create a larger, immersive project enabling the visitors to experience the material elements and atmosphere of the vanished riverside communities [Fig. 6]. The installation featured a fishing net canopy supported by bamboo. To build it, we also used the fish sculpture *Trey Reach* on display at Bophana Center. We incorporated historical photos of fishermen gathering, chatting, laughing, and interacting with water bodies. We created a series of drawings that evoked the contrast between tradition and modernity. For example, one drawing shows a fisherman and boats set against a riverside community on one side, and a modern ferry framed by a towering city skyline on the other side. For the performance, three team members walked through the installation and presented the drawings to the public while the fourth member told the story from the fish's perspective. Through this specific viewpoint, we tried to give a 'voice' to endangered species and show the interconnectedness of all living beings. Overall, the project was a reminder that the river is not just part of the environment but a lifeline for many living beings. We tried to raise awareness of urbanization's ecological impact on both humans and nonhumans, and therefore of the need for a more inclusive perception of community spaces.

Fig. 6 (right): Echoes of Water. (Photo courtesy of the "Fish" team, 2024)

Connect Lives

Keo Tephnemoll, Khan Kunsovann, Heng Rathanaksambath, Heng Sivma, and Kaing Thanaroth

During the workshop, we grew more and more interested in the ways everyday life, heritage, and modernization interact and how time shapes this interaction. We became particularly engrossed in the evolution of marketplaces. What fascinated us was the presence of contrasting yet culturally connected elements of past and present marketplaces. Sales prices have now gone up, and malls have appeared everywhere in the city. Yet, when it comes to traditional street food culture, some markets remain the same, whether it is at the Central Market, the Kandal Market, or the Russian Market. This inspired us to imagine interactions between people from different timelines and merge histories in order to uncover shared experiences. Our project's title, ផ្សារជីវិត *Phsar Jivit*, a wordplay in Khmer, reflects this dual meaning. According to the Choun Nath Dictionary, as a noun, it means a market, and as a verb, it means to weld or link. A picture by photographer John Vink (Bophana Center) gave us the context for the installation. It shows a citizen selling boiled duck eggs on a busy market sidewalk in 1989, a rather common sight then. We combined materials collected from the archives with recent images to create a series of photocollages about market life over two generations. To emphasize overlooked continuities, we imagined people from the past who encounter today's technological world and, conversely, present-day people who discover past lifestyles. The installation, at Bophana Center's entrance, recreated a boiled duck egg booth, with the photocollages in the background [Fig. 7]. For the presentation, we reenacted the sale and consumption of these eggs. At the end, visitors could grab an egg or two for the price of 500 riels ($1.25 USD). Nostalgia played a significant role in our project. Some visitors recalled their experiences of market life and food. For younger generations, though, it was something new. People's emotional engagement with our project highlighted the importance of bridging between past and present to ensure a meaningful future for cultural traditions.

Fig. 7 (right): Connect Lives. (Photo courtesy of the "Connect Lives" team, 2024)

on pictures (window shape, broken tile) to identify the exact torture rooms featured in the photos taken by the Vietnamese troops when they entered the compound in January 1979.[2] The visit ended with a discussion on the two memorials in TSGM courtyard, the memorial of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) with the names of all identified S-21 victims (2015) and French-Cambodian artist Séra's sculpture *To Those Who Are No Longer Here* (2015).[3]

It was the first time some of the students visited TSGM. Knowing that such an experience might be overwhelming, we had planned a moment in the afternoon to talk about it with them. We also thought it would be a good idea to focus, for the rest of the day, on a different subject – in that case, how everyday practices and 'poor' materials can be treated as archives, too. This was the topic of the online keynote given by anthropologist Kathrin Eitel, from the Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies (ISEK), University of Zurich. Her talk, entitled "Circular Researching as a Method for Making Sense of the Urban Fabric," addressed waste management and recycling in Phnom Penh. Kathrin discussed her methodologies, more specifically what she calls "research cycle," or the process of coming back to the research object through multiple lenses, from different perspectives, and with renewed questions. The students quickly adopted the concept and often referred to it when they described their projects.

From the third day of the workshop onwards, Bophana Center became our second home. The students spent hours watching archive footage and worked on their projects. It was a period of lengthy conversations with the facilitators. We tried to help them move, as Samnang said, 'from balloon to rock' – that is, to drop huge, infeasible plans for low-tech, manageable proposals. They setup their work on the last day. RPPP concluded with the public presentation of the four group projects: *Build your Own Monuments*, *Connect Lives*, *Echoes of the Water*, and *Living Facades*. The event was well-attended with over 80 visitors. Each group had 10-15 minutes to present their project, followed by a Q&A with guest discussants architect Roeun Virak and independent curator Moeng Meta.

With this workshop, we hoped to change the students' relationship with archives in many ways. Our first objective was to provide them with some methodological training that could help them navigate research in archive institutions by themselves. Our second objective was to transform their conceptions of what can be or become an archive, and thus of their potential role as archivists. We wanted the students to realize that anyone can be responsible for preserving, retrieving, and highlighting forgotten or under-documented stories. We also hoped that RPPP would help the students learn new skills, especially in terms of teamwork – how to assign tasks, work together under pressure, schedule and budget a project, negotiate and compromise. Lastly, we thought that the public presentation would be a good opportunity for them to go out of their comfort zones and, in the process, discover capacities they did not think they had.

The group projects confirmed that our objectives had been reached – and exceeded. The students threw themselves into the workshop wholeheartedly, sometimes working into the evening, well after the 'official' end of the day. Their installations-performances were the result of hours of reflection and discussion on what they had seen and how to present it. Their reports gave us further indication of what RPPP had achieved (or not). Most students expressed interest in continuing to document vernacular, communal, and everyday forms and spaces, thus producing archives for the future. Moreover, they considered archives as a significant source of inspiration for the creative design of friendlier public spaces and sustainable lifestyles. They also saw how a good knowledge of the past could help them become informed citizens with a louder voice in public debates on Phnom Penh's urbanization. The learning process was mutual. We started the workshop with some ideas of pedagogies. Their application 'in real life' showed what worked and what could be improved. For example, the students said they would have liked more time for onsite observation and interviews, or – not a big surprise given all the work they had put into their projects – a small exhibition instead of a one-evening presentation. The next workshop will integrate these elements and, hopefully, offer another stimulating framework for young Cambodians to experiment with archives.

Fig. 8 (left): Build Your Own Monuments [2024]. (Photo courtesy of the "Build Your Own Monuments" team, 2024)

Build Your Own Monuments

Morn Mab, Pav Lydoeun, Phea Sreynoch, Song Seakleng, and Tum Chankrisfa

Our project tried to challenge traditional notions of monumentality as something top-down and static. Instead, we wanted to rethink monuments as dynamic and participatory structures that can reflect Phnom Penh's diversity and ever-changing history. Our idea was to invite visitors to make monuments that would represent their personal memories and aspirations and could be added to existing ones. Archives provided the resources for this concept. The collections we explored not only shaped the project's design. They encouraged us to reassess how past events and figures have influenced the cityscape. As a result, we created an interactive installation where people could express their own identities and stories. We drew a map of Phnom Penh with basic information. Visitors could use colorful clay to shape their own monuments, then write quotes holding personal significance on small paper flags which they could pin on the clay and finally place their monuments on the map [Fig. 8]. People really enjoyed the project. For example, a visitor built an eggplant that represented his province (Takeo). It was his response to the provincial authorities' idea of using a balut as a regional symbol. He wanted something that expressed his own vision of it. We presented the map with a short, critical video about the evolution of monumentality in Phnom Penh since independence. The work combined views of the city's informal spaces with footage of monuments built by Cambodian leaders at different periods. It ended with images of Phnom Penh's most recent monument, the Win-Win Memorial, and its inauguration in 2018. The soundtrack blended ambient city sounds, popular music from these periods, and more reflective tones. With this project, we tried to show to the public that the cityscape is a living archive and it can be reinterpreted as a more inclusive space of making and sharing memories.

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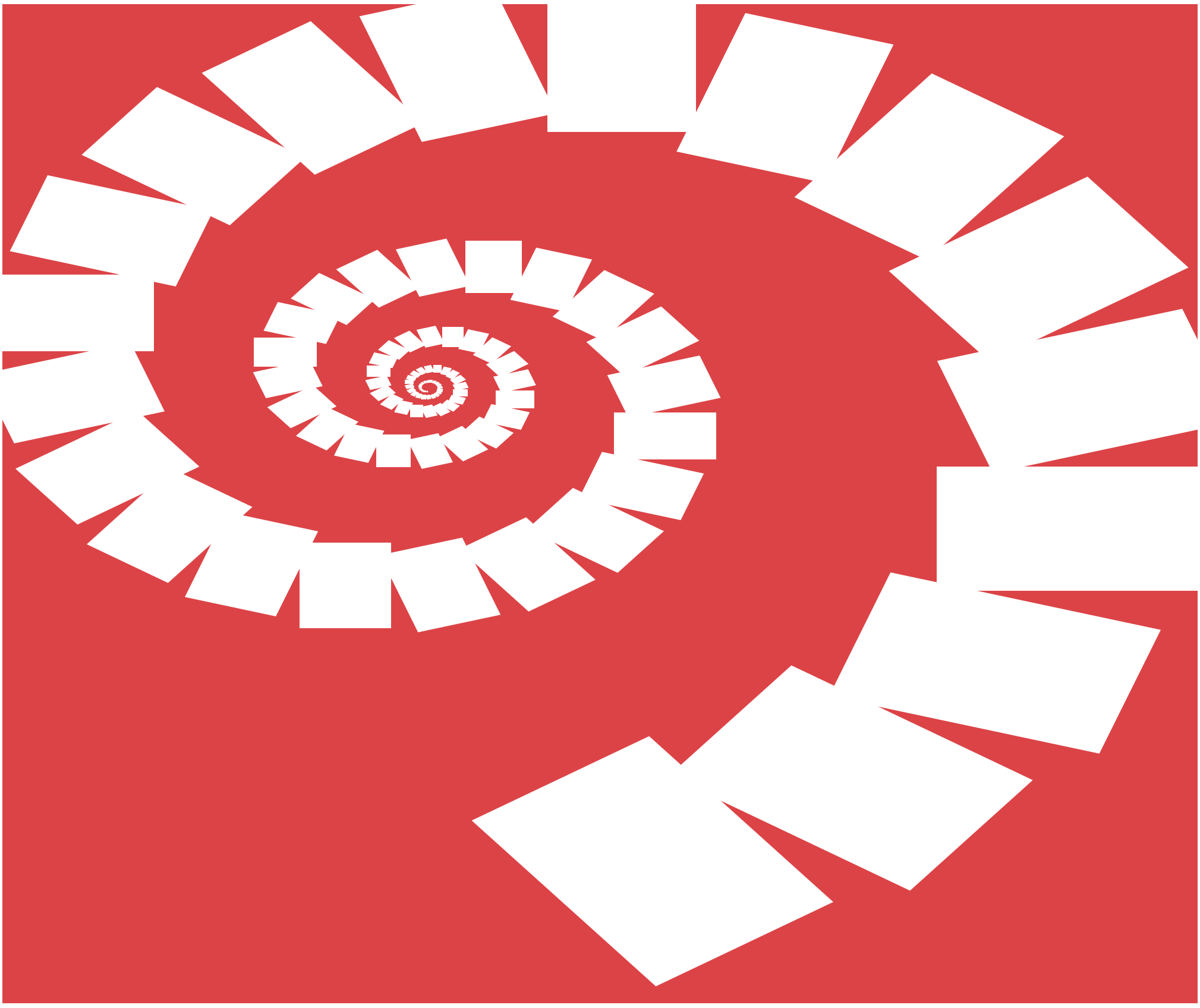
Notes

1 I would like to thank CKS for supporting the workshop financially and logistically and making this enriching experience possible. The dedication of the CKS team (Suong Samedy, Sreypich Tith, Sea Ngichlim, Rosa Rin) and RPPP's coordinator Roeun Brosnuth (who did much more than 'just' coordinate) as well as the support of RUFA and Bophana Center director Chea Sopheap and his staff were key to the workshop's success.

2 The tension between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam escalated into full-scale war throughout 1978. In December that year, Vietnamese troops and the Kampuchea United Front for National Salvation (nucleus of the successor regime) entered Cambodia. When they reached Phnom Penh in January 1979, the Khmer Rouge had already fled the city. S-21 was discovered by two Vietnamese army photographers within days of the Pol Pot regime's fall.

3 Both were projects developed in the frame of the tribunal's reparation measures.



Celebrating 100 Issues of *The Newsletter*

Paramita Paul and
Benjamin Linder

The Newsletter has been an integral part of the International Institute for Asian Studies since its inaugural issue in 1993, the same year IIAS was established. Over three decades later, this special edition of "The Focus" marks the 100th issue of the publication. Milestones such as this offer opportunities for self-reflection and evaluation. Rather than engage in retrospection or commemoration, however, this edition looks to the publication's present and future.

There are many facets that distinguish this publication from both academic journals and popular media outlets. *The Newsletter* falls somewhere between these two poles, thereby constituting a unique venue in which scholars, artists, students, and practitioners can join together in extended, critical discussions about key issues regarding Asia and its place in the world. The following pages present and discuss a series of core values and priorities held by the publication and its editorial team: (1) Diverse Voices and Multiple Languages, (2) Mappings and Re-mappings, (3) Accessibility and New Formats, (4) Creative Expression and Artistic Collaboration, (5) Critical Insights and Timely Interventions, and (6) Readers around the World. Taken together, this constellation of values undergirds the continued significance, impact, and singularity of *The Newsletter* within Asian Studies and well beyond.

When fellows and visitors arrive at the International Institute for Asian Studies, they frequently express surprise at the relatively small size of the operation. In general, IIAS maintains an outsized impact by serving as a platform that connects, facilitates, and amplifies the most exciting strands of research and pedagogy. *The Newsletter* is a pillar of this strategy, always striving to develop new modes of engagement and dissemination for colleagues and partners representing a diverse variety of disciplines, institutions, topics, and regions. Furthermore, much like IIAS itself, the scope and reach of *The Newsletter* far outpaces the relatively small team behind it. Subscribers hail from all over the world, and any given issue comprises a diverse array of contributions, including research articles, timely essays, relevant announcements, contributions on creative practice and curation, as well as regular updates from regional partner institutions in Europe, Southeast Asia, Australia, Northeast Asia, China, and more.

Since its first issue, *The Newsletter* and its editorial teams have produced a publication that bridges scholastic ivory towers and popular audiences, one that consistently transgresses the boundaries imposed by conventional systems of academic dissemination. That core mission persists to this 100th issue, and it will continue to guide the publication moving forward.

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1.

Diverse Voices and Multiple Languages

The Newsletter is primarily concerned with telling stories of people and places. Which stories to tell, and how to tell them, however, is a perennial topic of discussion. What is our field, and what are its different debates? Whose voices are loud and clear, and whose are hidden, or underrepresented? What does language do to a story and how we perceive it?


2.

In every issue, we actively solicit new work by diverse voices, such as those of junior scholars, female authors, and authors from, or working on, under-represented parts of Asia. Recent iterations of "The Focus" reflect this commitment to diverse representation. One collection has featured articles on the provenance of objects acquired from colonial Indonesia and Sri Lanka from the perspective of groups that are barely represented in the archives (Figs. 1-2). Other iterations of that section comprised articles highlighting the personal experiences of Indigenous People from different parts of Asia, written (or co-authored) by members of those communities themselves (Fig. 3).

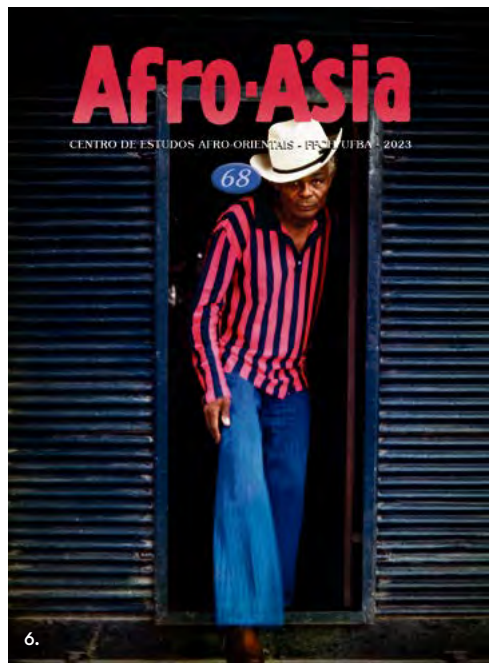
English is the language of communication in *The Newsletter* and on its satellite digital platforms *The Blog* and *The Channel*, but we are intent on exploring what happens when different languages are used simultaneously, or when work is translated from one language to another. For instance, on episode #37 *The Channel*, two Ta-u authors offered a recitation and translation of ceremonial words and a poem in the Ta-u language, to complement their English-language collection in "The Focus." Their voice recordings require us to confront how language, as well as sound and listening in general, shape knowledge and understanding. Our articles have also been translated back into the mother languages of their authors (e.g., Indonesian, the S'gaw Karen Indigenous language, etc.) and published in regional magazines (Fig. 4).

Recognizing the importance of engaging with multiple languages and translation, we continuously form new collaborations and experiment with fresh ideas. These include a new section called "The Imprint," which features the critical work of small publishers around the world, as well as publishers of translated works (Figs. 5a-c). Similarly, "The Region" section now features a page showcasing lesser-known journals from the Global South. This page can include journals published in languages other than English, and its first iteration featured the journal *Afro-Ásia* from Brazil (Fig. 6).


3.

4.

5.



6.

Fig. 1: One of the studied objects in PPROCE: A Korwar or ancestral statue from West Papua. Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll.no. RV-2432-3. This image previously appeared in Issue #92, Summer 2022.

Fig. 2: One of the studied objects in PPROCE: A Letter of the Sultan of Madura presented to the Dutch King William I. Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll. no. RV-360-8080-1. This image previously appeared in Issue #92, Summer 2022.

Fig. 3: Bais in her vahey (Photo courtesy of Sinan Hana, 2022). This image previously appeared in Issue #98, Summer 2024.

Fig. 4: S'gaw Karen magazine cover, which included an article from The Newsletter (Issue #94) translated back into the Karen language. This image previously appeared in Issue #96, Autumn 2023.

Fig. 5a-c: A selection of "The Imprint" pages, highlighting Gantala Press from the Philippines, Zubaan Books from India, and Tilted Axis Press from the United Kingdom. These pages previously appeared in Issue #97 (Spring 2024), Issue #98 (Summer 2024), and Issue #99 (Autumn 2024), respectively.

Fig. 6: *Afro-Ásia* journal cover, n. 68 (Photo courtesy of Afro-Ásia, 2023). This image previously appeared in Issue #97, Spring 2024.

Mappings and Re-mappings

Any study of Asia in the world is situated in a particular time and space. At *The Newsletter*, we are interested in the projections and maps that result from those positions. Where is Asia on our cartographic, cognitive, and metaphorical maps? How do we map the Asian continent? And what purposes do our maps serve? Mapping plays a crucial role in producing and shaping knowledge, and while most of our research necessarily focuses on one or more areas, articles in *The Newsletter* highlight the importance of remaining self-reflexive about our own representations and imaginaries of these spaces. Our articles encourage critical consideration of the ways in which different scholarly and political positions generate different "epistemic maps" about the world we inhabit, of how diverse geographical knowledges relate to one another, and of how these maps get redrawn and contested across time and space.

We are just as enthusiastic about alternative maps, such as a map of Pu'er, which was designed during a time of changing borders and new political situations (Fig. 1), as we are about problems of representations of Meiji Japan (1868-1912) in photographs for foreign audiences (Fig. 2). We want to explore how satellite images of an archeological site such as Nalanda affect understandings of space and place (Fig. 3), and to consider how urban maps and directories of the Escolta street corridor in Manila reflect the complex relationships between formal and informal systems and structures in the city (Fig. 4). Equally, research that traces the movement of people and objects across regions highlights the importance of connections across official political borders. This happens in articles on communities living in the Himalayas, or on objects that have emerged from the contact between Spain, Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Fig. 5), or on any number of diasporic communities around the world. Such research challenges conventional frameworks as well as the conventional idea of "Asia" as a stable territory of definable nation-states.

The new connections that we have developed as an institute, and in the course of 100 issues of *The Newsletter*, emphasize the significance of places as crossroads of exchange and transformation. We are interested in the debates held in the Global South, and between the South and the North, and in the difference that those debates can make. The insular worlds of the Indian Ocean, for instance, were a regional designation in one of our earliest issues. The current issue returns to such islands in more than one article, as places where narratives are constructed and defied.

Our publication offers a platform for new Southern connections, and our pages frequently highlight our institutional partnerships with the likes of the Airlangga Institute of Indian Ocean Crossroads, the Federal University of Bahia in Brazil, and many more. We are equally excited about featuring new European partners, such as the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at Tallinn University (Fig. 6), or POLIS University in Tirana. The news of these new connections and partners, in the form of in-depth essays and reports, will continue to change our view of "Asia" and inspire us to pursue novel lines of inquiry moving forward.

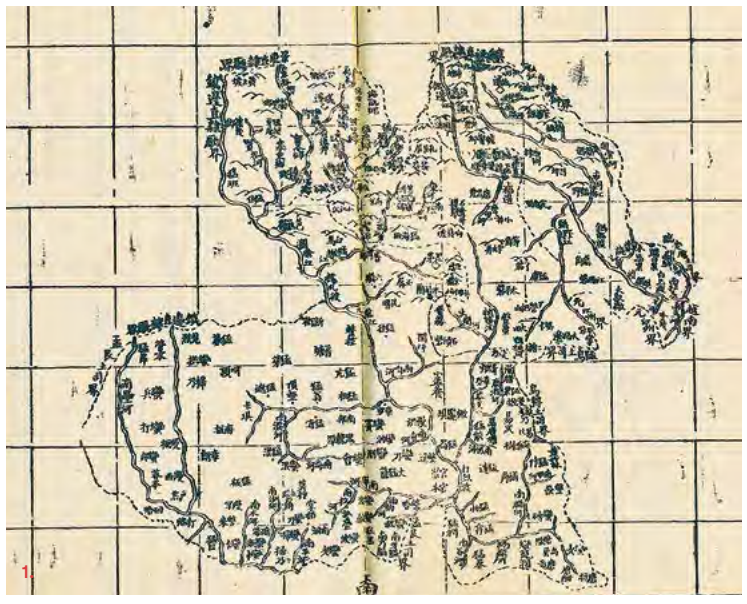


Fig. 1: The Map of Pu'er 普洱 from Tang Jiong's Xu Yunnan tongzhi. At the Southwestern border, Mengwu and Wude are marked. This image previously appeared in Issue #84, Autumn 2019.

Fig. 2: "702 To look over iron bridge from Uji river" from Photograph album of a trip to Japan (Ms. Coll. 833), photographer unknown, late 19th century, Courtesy of the Kislak Center for Special Collections, University of Pennsylvania Libraries. This image previously appeared in Issue #91, Spring 2022.

Fig. 3: Residents of Begumpur examining the 3D satellite image of their village and environs. This image previously appeared in Issue #69, Autumn 2014.

Fig. 4: Escolta map and directory designed for the Escolta Block Party in 2016, 98B Collaboratory. This image previously appeared in Issue #90, Autumn 2021.

Fig. 5: Berimbau players in the US, featuring Mestre Cobra Mansa, in 2003 (Photo by Sam Fentress, retrieved from Wikipedia Commons). This image previously appeared in Issue #95, Summer 2023.

Fig. 6: Tallinn panorama. This image previously appeared in Issue #91, Spring 2022.

1.

Fig. 1: Distribution of paper copies of *The Newsletter*, 2023 (Image created by Thomas Voorter, 2023). A version of this infographic previously appeared in Issue #97, Spring 2024.

Accessibility and New Formats

The Newsletter maintains a deep commitment to accessibility in the broadest sense, a position that encompasses a wide array of editorial policies and dissemination practices. While the publication remains rooted in scholarship, its goal is to overcome the divides between disciplines and, more generally, between academia and the wider world. This begins with ensuring that anyone who wants to read our content – regardless of location or institutional affiliation – can do so (Fig. 1). Since its inception, IIAS has never charged subscription fees for _The Newsletter_, and this continues to be true for both the print and online versions.

In the past three years, the editorial team has also developed new digital platforms that uphold the value of public accessibility. Launched in 2022, *The Channel* is IIAS' flagship podcast, connecting scholars, activists, artists, and the broader public in sustained conversation about Asia and its place in the contemporary world (Fig. 2). Many episodes have featured interviews with authors about their latest books, on topics ranging from economic transformation in Mongolia to the sordid history of "comfort women" in Indonesia, from translations of Swahili poetry to ethnomusicology in Palau. We also feature interviews with curators about current exhibitions related to Asia, as well as group conversations on specific topics. Recent episodes have explored everything from Brazil-Africa connections to the organizing struggles of migrant domestic workers. Meanwhile, *The Blog* hosts curated conversations, offering a community forum that is swift but deliberate, informal but rigorous, critical but welcoming. Popular collections include "Pop Pacific," which focuses on the creation of transnational popular culture like K-pop and J-pop, as well as "Migrant Biographies," which highlights the experiences and struggles of migrant workers (Figs. 3-4).

Beyond literal access to the publication, accessibility also pertains to content. A variety of editorial, stylistic, and design guidelines ensure that each article we publish can reach the widest possible audience. First and foremost, this entails the writerly voice of our authors, as well as their mode of engagement with local communities (Fig. 5). For all contributions, we actively discourage disciplinary jargon and lengthy literature reviews. We encourage relatively short manuscripts, written in language that is clear, succinct, and precise. Such a style strengthens, rather than cheapens, the scholarly contribution of each article. It enables authors to more effectively communicate with others in their sub-field, but also to reach a larger audience of educated non-specialists.

Through all of these practices and projects, *The Newsletter* consistently aims at diversifying the ways in which both contributors and audiences engage with our various platforms (Fig. 6).

2.

Fig. 2: Jewellord Nem Singh sits for an interview on *The Channel* podcast. (Photo courtesy of Sandra Dehue, 2024)

3.

Fig. 3: The Japanese musical group BabyMetal. This image appeared in a contribution to the "Pop Pacific" collection on *The Blog*, posted on October 9, 2023: https://blog.iias.asia/pop-pacific/baby-metal-musical-entrepreneurs

4.

Fig. 4: Chinese businesses line a winter street in Montreal (Photo by Unsplash user Joy Real, 2021). This image appeared in a contribution to the "Migrant Biographies" collection on The Blog from February 21, 2023: https://blog.iias.asia/migrants-biographies/no-french-no-house-no-job-my-struggle-against-disillusionment-freezing-montreal

5.

Fig. 5: Community-engaged heritage research. This image previously appeared in Issue #73, Spring 2016.

6.

Fig. 6: Members of the IIAS team promote the institute and distribute *The Newsletter* at the Association of Asian Studies (AAS) conference in Seattle, March 2024.

Creative Expression and Artistic Collaboration

The Newsletter explores Asia not just through research and writing, but also through creative and artistic formats, from visual objects such as painting, film, photography, and built environments, to music, performance, street art, and festivals (Fig. 1). Our issues provide space for the critical analysis of such creative output, probing how the arts construct and contest forms of social difference.

Crucially, we are also interested in the experiences of creatives themselves, from curators, artists, performers, and craftspeople to directors, festival organizers, and art historians. Our section "The Tone" serves as a platform for showcasing their ideas, practices, and actions. These articles often involve multiple sensory modalities, and whenever possible, we aim to provide additional visuals, video, and audio in the online version of *The Newsletter* and on our flagship podcast *The Channel*.

In conversations with curators, we might hear the fascinating stories behind exhibitions. In "Asian Bronze," the team behind the blockbuster exhibition at the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam recount how they brought objects that are rarely seen outside of their countries of origin to The Netherlands. In "Home and the World," the curator of an exhibition of contemporary artists from Asia at Museum Van Loon in Amsterdam, elaborates on how artists can play a role in open-source environments for research (Figs. 2-3). Creativity and art are almost always collaborative projects, and all articles in this category are collections of voices: in an article on the Museum of Material Memory, for instance, its founder discusses this crowdsourced digital repository of objects that had migrated with refugees during the Partition of the Indian subcontinent (Fig. 4). Similarly, in Japan, and while referring to her art installation for a tactile exhibition for people with disabilities, artist Sahoko Aki emphasizes the role of archeological and cultural heritage in community-building and the importance of making participation in heritage as accessible and inclusive as possible (Figs. 5-6). Articles by art historians might take us back to the 11th century (as in the collection "Turks, Texts, and Territory") (Fig. 7), but we are just as driven to publish contemporary artists' responses to current issues, such as an interview with Issam Kourbaj on the Syrian refugee crisis (Fig. 8).

1.

Fig. 1: Postcard depicting the state of the monuments at the turn of the 20th century (Postcard from the collection of Elena Paskaleva). This image previously appeared in Issue #95, Summer 2023.


2.

Fig. 2: *KANAVAL* (1995 – ongoing), by Leah Gordon. Photo: Thijs Wolzak (courtesy of Museum Van Loon, 2024). This image previously appeared in Issue #99, Autumn 2024.


3.

Fig. 3: *One Hundred and Nineteen Deeds of Sale* (2018), by Sue Williamson. Photo: Thijs Wolzak (courtesy of Museum Van Loon, 2024). This image previously appeared in Issue #99, Autumn 2024.

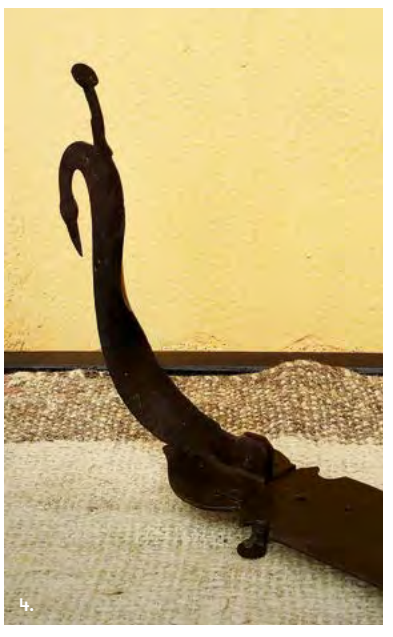

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Fig. 4: The bonti passed down the generations of women in Kasturi Mukherjee's family (Photograph courtesy of Kasturi Mukherjee). This image previously appeared in Issue #90, Autumn 2021.

Fig. 5: Reconstruction of a festival at the Sannai-Maruyama site. (Painting by Sahoko Aki, in collaboration with S. Koyama, 1996. Published in Quarterly Magazine Obayashi No. 42.) This image previously appeared in Issue #99, Autumn 2024.

Fig. 6: Several stages in conceptualizing the reconstruction of the Fudōdō site in Fig. 4, based on information from an archaeologist and a geologist (Sketches by Sahoko Aki, 2017). These images previously appeared in Issue #99, Autumn 2024.


7.

8.

Fig. 7: Hülegü and his wife, Doquz Khatun, in Jāmiʿ al-Tavārīkh. This image previously appeared in Issue #95, Summer 2023.

Fig. 8: *Sole-less*, Issam Kourbaj, 2018. Soleless shoes and roadsign. Photograph courtesy of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. This image previously appeared in Issue #89, Autumn 2021.

Critical Insights and Timely Interventions

With its global reach and its commitment to accessibility, *The Newsletter* enables scholars to share their critical work with wider audiences. This begins with quality research conducted by scholars at various stages in their academic careers, from freshly minted MAs through emeritus professors. The articles we publish explore themes and topics from across the social sciences and humanities. This wide scope includes a focus on the historical as well as the contemporary for understanding Asia and the world.

1.

2.

Recent editions have featured articles examining a range of subjects, from the politics of memorial monuments in contemporary Manila to early 20th-century postcards in Native America and China (Fig. 1), and from roadways in the Himalayas (Fig. 2) to neighborhood engagement in Southeast Asia. The publication increasingly seeks to expand into other disciplines as well, with recent or planned submissions on geology, botany, journalism, ecology, and the performing arts.

In addition to presenting and publicizing new research, we also encourage timely articles on pressing sociopolitical issues. One of IIAS' core priorities is to break free of academic silos and ivory towers – that is, to demonstrate the importance of humanities and social science knowledge not only for its intrinsic value, but also for its ability to lend necessary perspective to current events. Compared to most academic journals, *The Newsletter* prides itself on a relatively swift submission-to-publication timeline, and we frequently ask colleagues with regional or topical expertise to contextualize timely news stories: the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2020-2021 (Fig. 3), the pressing issue of provenance and repatriation in European museums (Fig. 4), the COP26 climate change conference, the war in Ukraine, political upheaval in Sri Lanka, and many more. In a similar vein, *The Newsletter* and its digital platforms offer space for colleagues to comment upon the structural challenges of contemporary academia, from travel bureaucracy and passport inequality to job precarity and changing mechanisms of funding (Fig. 5). Another new section, "The Slate," extends this concern with contemporary academia into the realm of 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. Thus far, "The Slate" has featured articles on teaching philosophy to elite engineering students in India, the use of graphic novels in the classroom (Fig. 6), the development of community storytelling and place-based educational methods, and much more. Thus, *The Newsletter* consistently aims to bring scholarly insights to current challenges facing our political, academic, and multi-cultural communities.

3.

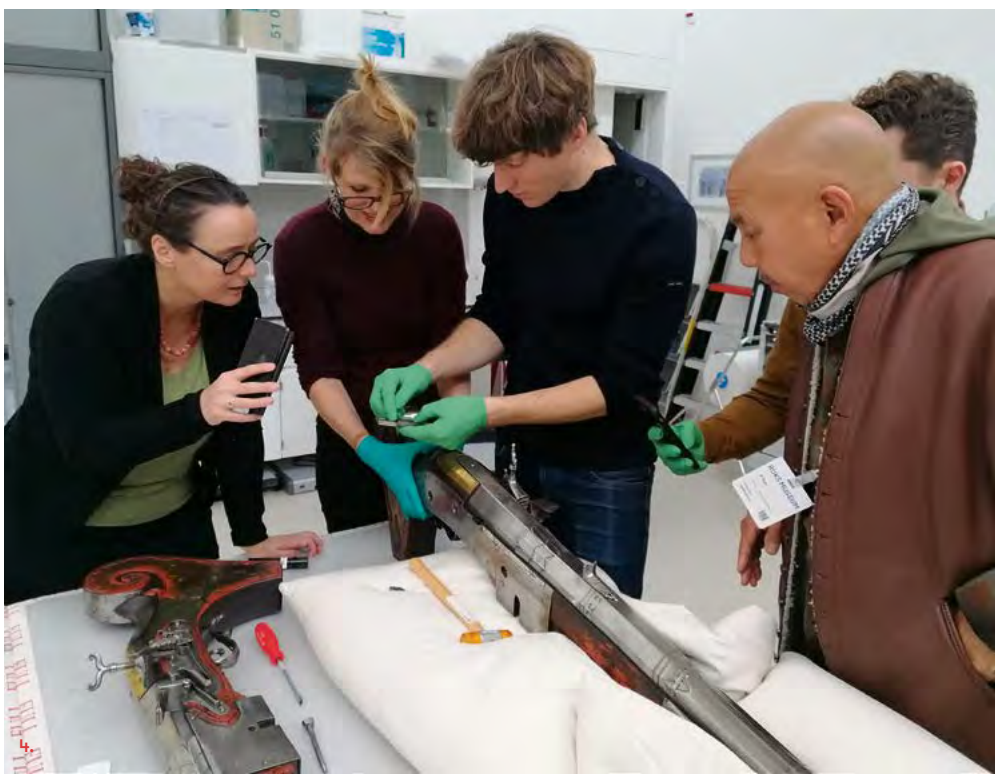

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Fig. 1: *[Chinese Boat] Made in China by the Chinese Stamps*. Stamp Collage Postcard, c. 1925. Undivided back, 13.9 x 8.9 cm. Author's [Omar Khan's] collection. This image previously appeared in Issue #98, Summer 2024.

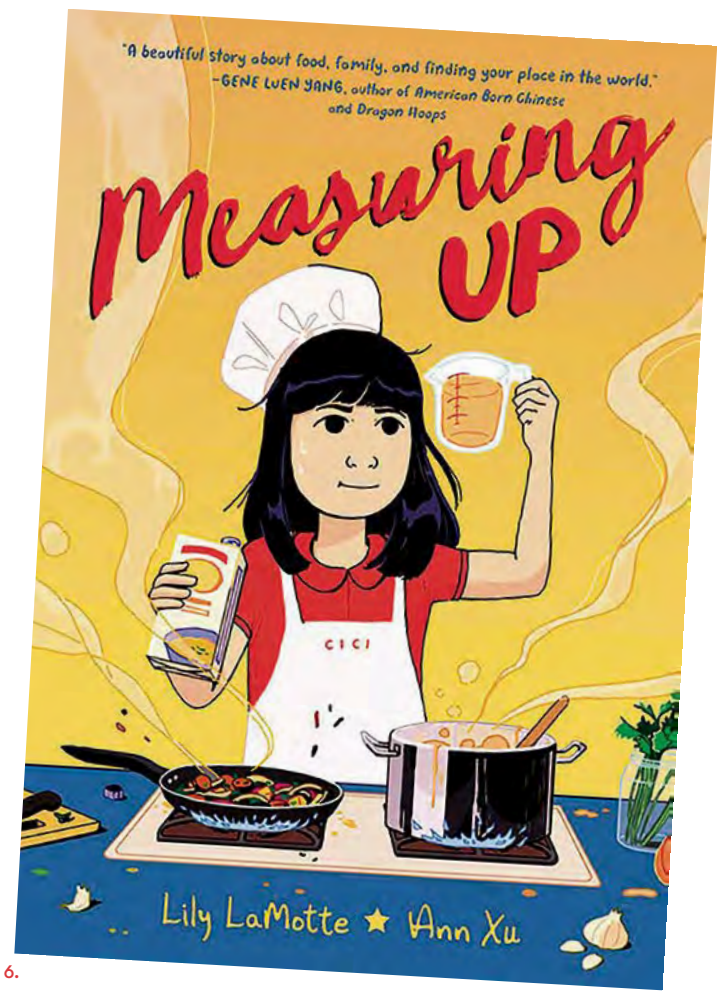
Fig. 2: A dirt road in Yangden. Most dirt roads looked like this after the community's land was divided into individual family plots and fenced in the 1990s (Photo by John Smith [pseudonym], 2018). This image previously appeared in Issue #97, Spring 2024.

Fig. 3: A meeting of village elders in the district of Derawud in southwestern Uruzgan, southern Afghanistan. Two of the founders of the Taliban movement, Mullah Omar and Mullah Baradar, both lived and worked in this district before moving to Kandahar and setting up their organization (Photograph by Willem Vogelsang, 2009). This image previously appeared in Issue #90, Autumn 2021.

Fig. 4: Inspecting the mechanics of the Maha Thuwakku in the studio of the Rijksmuseum (Photo by Eveline Sint Nicolaas, Rijksmuseum). This image previously appeared in Issue #92, Summer 2022.

Fig. 5: Illustration by Xiaolan Lin [@xiaolanlan65]. This image previously appeared in Issue #94, Spring 2023.

Fig. 6: *Measuring Up* by Lily LaMotte (HarperAlley, 2020). This cover image previously appeared in Issue #93, Autumn 2022.



6.

"*The Newsletter* brings information that is outside our direct area of interest/ concern. And that is what makes the magazine so interesting to read or, to put it poetically: it is the window through which we can look outside."

"Every section of *The Newsletter* is highly engrossing and highly readable."

"For me, it is a good source of info to keep an eye on recent developments, topics that otherwise you do not hear about. It is a bit similar to listening to other people chat in a university hallway. For those of us who are outside of academia but want to know what's going on in research, *The Newsletter* is the way to go. So, please keep up your great work!"

"I subscribed to *The Newsletter* decades ago. It is one the best academic newsletters that updates me on ongoing Asian and South Asian research activities."

"For me, an economist, with an interdisciplinary and institutional orientation, *The Newsletter* serves as a source of the historical and cultural dimensions of the Asian development process."

"Leading voice in Asian Studies. A global platform for different voices."

"I have subscribed since the mid-1990s. While teaching I appreciated many of the articles that gave me stories and insights that I could use for my lectures. I sometimes reproduced articles for students to read as part of their class material."

"The diversity of topics covered allows for a well-rounded understanding of Asian Studies, with sections dedicated to scholarly articles, commentary, and reflections that enrich the academic discourse. For instance, the features on contemporary issues provide insights into current events and their implications, while the profiles of emerging scholars and practitioners showcase fresh perspectives and innovative ideas. Additionally, the inclusion of cultural contributions, such as art and film critiques, broadens the understanding of Asia by highlighting the interplay between culture and academic study. This multifaceted approach ensures that readers not only stay informed but also engaged with a variety of voices and disciplines within the field."

"Unlike many other academic journals that may adhere to stricter formats and limited themes, *The Newsletter* engages with a wider array of topics that challenge conventional boundaries of Asian Studies, encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue and providing a platform for both established and emerging scholars. Additionally, its commitment to accessibility and community engagement further sets it apart, actively seeking to reflect the complexities of Asia's narratives and experiences both within and beyond the region."

Readers around the World

Comprising a network of subscribers around the world, the readership of *The Newsletter* has steadily grown since our first issue in 1993. After over three decades, that audience now includes scholars, activists, students, and professionals – anyone with an interest in the histories, cultures, languages, and politics of Asia.

The print editions are regularly displayed and distributed in university buildings, public libraries, art museums, faculty offices, and conference halls. On the occasion of our 100th issue, we want to express our sincere gratitude for the encouragement we regularly receive from these readers and institutions. On this page, we highlight a selection of quotes and comments received in response to a recent survey about the reach and reception of *The Newsletter*.

Our readership constitutes a vibrant and passionate community, and that community strengthens and sustains all the work done by IIAS to amplify Asian Studies research. As the publication continues to adapt to an ever-changing world, we look forward to engaging further with readers and fostering meaningful conversations and new modes of knowledge dissemination.

Fig. 1 (above): A reader peruses Issue #5 of *The Newsletter* (Photo courtesy of IIAS, c. 1995).
Fig. 2 (below): Issue #95 of *The Newsletter* (Photo courtesy of IIAS, 2023).

"As an open-access publication, it reaches a diverse global audience, including researchers, policymakers, and the general public. The content strikes a balance between academic rigor and public scholarship. Many Asian Studies journals operate within specific national or regional frameworks, whereas *The Newsletter* takes an international and transregional approach, linking Asian studies with global trends. By combining academic depth with accessibility and interdisciplinary dialogue, The Newsletter offers a unique and valuable platform for those interested in Asian Studies."

"I have been amazed with the wide range of themes covered and insightful presentations each time I read your articles."

"In an age of digital media, I appreciate receiving *The Newsletter* as a hard copy publication in the post. I find it convenient, and the fact that it is free is a bonus. Although I generally only read full articles in the print version, I always look at the online notifications as well to get firsthand news about upcoming events and articles."

"It really focuses on Asian Studies and its different fields of study. For a young scholar like me, it is good to understand that, within Asian Studies, I can use several approaches to work on several issues."

"As a US-based scholar, I appreciate getting news on European Asianists, which *The Newsletter* provides."

"I first subscribed to keep up to date with trends in Asian Studies to help my professional work at the time as an Asian Studies Librarian. It has also been of help in my own field of Southeast Asian History."

"I am a college teacher in the state of Kerala, India. Impressed by the high quality of *The Newsletter* during a 2022 visit to Leiden, I immediately subscribed to it. Over the past two years, I have been receiving and reading it diligently, making it a habit to save each issue."

"I enjoy the way it explores cultures, traditions, ideas, and I like its engaging format and vibrant, colorful design."

"I have always seen the *The Newsletter* as a fantastic and in-depth way to communicate research-in-the-making to a large audience. Nowadays there are blogs and online publications, but *The Newsletter* covers much more in terms of regions and disciplines than other media. It is comprehensive and has different formats that create space for diverse content that you cannot find elsewhere. Reading *The Newsletter* is always very inspirational and helps to think outside of the box."

"*The Newsletter* serves as a platform for both established and emerging scholars, fostering knowledge exchange without the constraints of paywalls or disciplinary boundaries."

"It's perfect and complete."

Around the world, academic and cultural institutions face a dramatic wave of financial and ideological hazards. Far from scholarly luxuries, the humanities and social sciences foster democratic life, encourage multicultural coexistence, and strengthen our capacity to imagine livable collective futures. Disproportionate attacks on these disciplines threaten not only operational budgets, but also the suite of values embodied in higher education: curiosity and creativity, dialogue and justice, critical inquiry and thoughtful reflection. In such precarious times – marked by geopolitical uncertainty, cultural upheaval, economic inequality, and reactionary political backlash – we at IIAS reaffirm these values and oppose any efforts to undermine them.

Maya Kamaty: Creole Musical Innovations

Rosa Beunel-Fogarty

Fig. 1 (below): Album cover, SOVAZ by Maya Kamaty. (Artwork by Arnaud Jourdan, produced by Lamayaz)

Fig. 2 (bottom): Maya Kamaty at SunSka Festival in August 2024, Vertheuil, France. (Photo by Erwan Auvray @erwan_auvray_live)

"Sovaz," the title track of Maya Kamaty's latest album, starts with a warning: the gloves are off [Fig1]. Her songs are now impudent, brazen. '*Sovaz*' is a Reunionese Creole term from Kamaty's home island in the Mascarene archipelago of the Southwest Indian Ocean. To a French speaker '*sovaz*' sounds like '*sauvage*,' which can best be translated as 'wild.' In interviews, however, the songwriter and musician translates it as '*insolente*' in French, while her translation of the lyrics in English online reads as "loud." The French and Reunionese Creole homonyms signal a telling semantic shift when illuminated by Reunion Island's history of slavery and French colonisation. It has been well-established that colonialist propaganda – and, prior to that, discourses surrounding the slave trade – portrayed non-Europeans as uncivilised people, savages who were either only good for hard labour, or to be educated by colonisers to become worthy citizens of a modern world. In becoming 'insolent,' '*sovaz*' took on the more positive meaning of 'rebellious.' In other words, what makes someone '*sovaz*' is their unwillingness to abide by prescribed rules and norms, which, in a colonial context, are the expression and extension of a racist state and oppressive economic power. Sovaz is defiance.

Sovaz, however, is not only a reference to Reunion Island's colonial past. The English translation into 'loud' indicates Kamaty's disregard and denunciation of standards of femininity that demand women be both physically and socially pleasant and agreeable. A 'loud' woman is unappealing, threatening, vulgar. To quote Virginie Despente, she is not a prized item on "the universal market of the consumable chick."[1] By claiming this epithet, Kamaty announces the political commitment of her music that is in step with the musical and visual aesthetic shift she took with her previous EP. Distinctively more trap and electro than her two previous albums, SOVAZ is both anchored in the local Reunionese context and stylistically accessible to global audiences, as it draws on recognised urban sounds and aesthetics from the hip hop scene, and iconic styles and body postures first popularised by African-American musicians. This article will introduce readers to Maya Kamaty's production and career before discussing what her work can tell us about the adaptation and preservation of Indian Ocean Creole heritage and, by extension, the heritage of minority cultures in the current age of globalisation.

Reunion Island: Music and Politics

While performing, Kamaty exudes an extraordinary presence and energy. Her vocal dexterity, her tracks' furious beats, and her melancholic melodies command the audience's attention. Whether accompanied by a band or solo with her music production device, Kamaty will always at some point play the *kayamb* [Fig 2]. Traditionally made of cane flower stalks filled with seeds, the *kayamb* is one of the instruments used for playing maloya, a popular musical genre in Reunion Island. Recognised in 2009 as intangible world heritage by UNESCO, maloya was introduced on the island by African and Malagasy enslaved people, who played it during spiritual ceremonies.[2] In Reunion, it soon became a medium through which the enslaved lamented about and protested against their condition, asserting maloya as the music of the people and workers, who after abolition were joined in large numbers by indentured Indian labourers. Indeed, 'Kamaty,' Maya Pounia's stage name and middle name, is of *Malbar* (Malabar) origin and serves as a reminder of Indians' influence on Reunionese music culture.

Kan Mon Bébet i lèv
When my blood boils up
I fé tranm loraz
Even storms cower
Rant dann ron
Gloves off, go
Pa kapon
No fear, no
Wi Mi lé Sovaz
Yes I'm proudly loud

One of France's so-called "old colonies," Reunion Island became a French overseas department in 1946 and remains so to this day. Music in general and maloya in particular are sites where the conflicted relationship between Reunion and France has been articulated and negotiated, especially during the 1970s, a period marked by a renewed interest in Creole Reunionese culture. Against the assimilationist, paternalist, and colonialist deployment of Creole language and folklore by the elite, an artistic production emerged that used Reunionese culture to claim cultural and political autonomy from

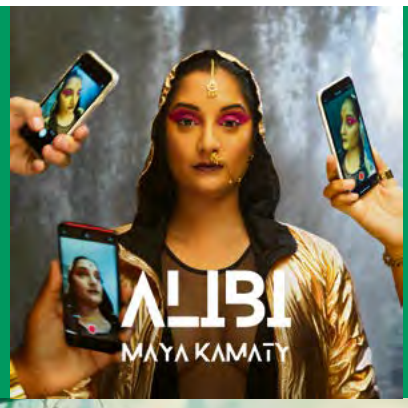


Fig. 3 (left): Cover of Maya Kamaty's single "Alibi." (Picture by Eric Lafargue, produced by Lamayaz)

Fig. 4 (below): Still from "Sovaz" music video, director Formidable(s) Aloïs Fructus, produced by Lamayaz.

Fig. 5: Maya Kamaty at Sakifo festival in June 2021, Saint Pierre, Reunion Island. (Photo by Mikael Thuillier)

the metropole.[3] The political component of this struggle was led by the Parti Communiste Réunionnais (Reunionese Communist Party, abbreviated as PCR), who actively renewed maloya music. The genre "became the symbol of censured and oppressed poor lower-class culture," and, because of its association with PCR activities, "was systematically disrupted and suppressed by the authorities."[4]

It is in this context that Kamaty's parents, Gilbert Pounia and Anny Grondin became, respectively, the leader of Reunion's most successful band (Ziskakan) and an author and storyteller. Pounia and Grondin were important figures of an artistic movement working against Reunionese people's acculturation. They saw Reunion's aesthetic and political alignment with France as not only precluding Reunionese culture from thriving, but also from being open to other influences, such as neighbouring Indian Ocean cultures.[5] In writing and singing in Reunionese Creole and adopting features from maloya, Kamaty continues the fight of her parents' generation. At the same time, the challenges now lie elsewhere than solely in Reunion's relationship to France. How can Reunionese artists, and other minority artists, carve out a space on the global music scene? With her music, Kamaty transcends geographical borders by reflecting on women's condition, increasing political corruption, wealth inequalities, and the cult of the body propagated by social media [Fig 3].

The Indian Ocean Islands' Music Industry

My research on Maya Kamaty's music emerges from this question: what happens to Creole cultures and artistic productions in our era of globalisation? Defined by a greater international circulation of cultural goods aided by the rise of new technologies, contemporary globalisation leads to an increased internationalisation of the cultural scene, one that is no longer (only) a euphemism for United States imperialism. In the Indian Ocean, globalisation is also associated with the long history of oceanic trades that fostered cultural exchanges and transformations. However, the contemporary music industry, where Kamaty and her peers such as Sodaj and Labelle innovate musically, illuminates new cultural networks connecting Indian Ocean territories.[6] Such territories include small island nations such as Reunion, Mauritius, the Comoros, and the Seychelles, for which competing on the global market is often a challenge.

Unevenly developed and unequally decolonised, these islands share histories of contact, colonial legacy, and geography that underpin their contemporary cultural collaborations, as manifested in festivals, prizes, and professionalisation initiatives that raise the profile of local artists. For instance, Kamaty began her career performing at the Sakifo festival in 2013, when she competed for and was awarded the Alain Peters Prize that enabled her and her band to perform on the main stage of the festival the following year [Fig 5]. The award also included a one-week residence at the Kabardock studio in Reunion and financial support from Sacem, a music publishing association. Sakifo is one of the largest and longest running contemporary music festivals in the region. It is dedicated to including "local artists from the Indian Ocean and the rest of the world" to showcase "diverse aesthetics, representative of cultures, countercultures and current trends."[7]
The same year, Kamaty was also awarded the Music of the Indian Ocean award. Only musicians working in Madagascar, Seychelles, Comoros, Mayotte, Mauritius, Reunion, and Rodrigues, could compete for the prize. Winners received coaching sessions by music professionals and gained access to the international festival scene. While this prize is no longer running, Sakifo's success led to the creation of the Indian Ocean Music Market (IOMMa), where selected artists from across the Indian Ocean – eastern and southern Africa, Australia, India, as well as all the islands in between – can showcase their work to international stakeholders in the music business. These regional events play an important role in establishing and sustaining Indian Ocean cultural networks and supporting the global circulation of its music. They are also important avenues for Indian Ocean scholarship and transcultural encounters. In this context, Reunion's thriving music scene, its administrative status, and its history of creolisation make the island an attractive hub and a major player in the Indian Ocean music industry.

Music Videos: Creole Heritage on the Move

Another key element of contemporary musicians' careers is their online presence. While social media posts are easy tools for promoting new releases and sharing news about tour dates, they also serve to circulate public images of the performer that connect them to a community of style and taste.[8] Online engagement gives artists the opportunity to be 'read' through recognisable aesthetic codes by a global audience. Circling back to Maya Kamaty's latest album *SOVAZ*, I would like to discuss one of its distinctive features: each track has been released with an accompanying music video. Adjacent to the music, videos are above all a promotional tool, but their key economic function "is to promote not the individual song, but rather the artist or band who perform it."[9] Online musician forums and blog posts describe the music video as a business card – in other words, the level of legitimation acquired will depend on the quality of the video, which works as a proof of the artist's professionalism. Kamaty has released many original and polished music videos that showcase not only her talent but the expertise of other local artists, technicians, and dancers.

In tune with her musical turn, Kamaty's music videos borrow from the aesthetic codes of hip hop while also being anchored in and referring to Reunionese politics and heritage. The music video of "Sovaz" was shot in Reunion and includes different sets reminiscent of Creole history, especially of the creolisation of the Indian diaspora. The video moves between an auditorium where Kamaty both watches and appears in a movie that mixes references to Bollywood and Hollywood; a grocery store that can be read as a nod to the history of Gujarati merchants; and a sugar cane field where Kamaty drives an ox cart, an obvious reference to slavery and indentureship [Fig 4]. In this set, Kamaty is preceded by dancers adorned with flower garlands and dancing to the sound of the sitar. One last set shows an ironically regal looking Kamaty sitting on a white peacock chair. On her right-hand side a small boar or a *cochon marron* is wearing a garland, symbolising the defiance of the enslaved via the history of marronage. Indian coded, the garland matches the video's Indian theme, but also signals the Afro-Asian foundations of Reunionese Creole heritage.

As the chorus of the song indicates – "Kri amwin Queen / Diva," – Kamaty, here, is a queen. But, we may ask, a queen of what? She is the queen of Reunion Island's musical future, cognisant of its complex and violent history and moved by the ongoing creolisation of an already creolised heritage. Kamaty's music and aesthetic continue to redefine a 'traditional' genre, which according to UNESCO is "threatened by social changes and by the disappearance of its main exponents and the practice of venerating ancestors."[10] While maloya as a spiritual practice may no longer exist, its reinvention by new generations of artists is a testament to its malleability, and a greater guarantee of its perenniality in a global cultural scene that seeks and rewards originality and innovation. Kamaty's work is an exciting example of Creole heritage's preservation as renewal.

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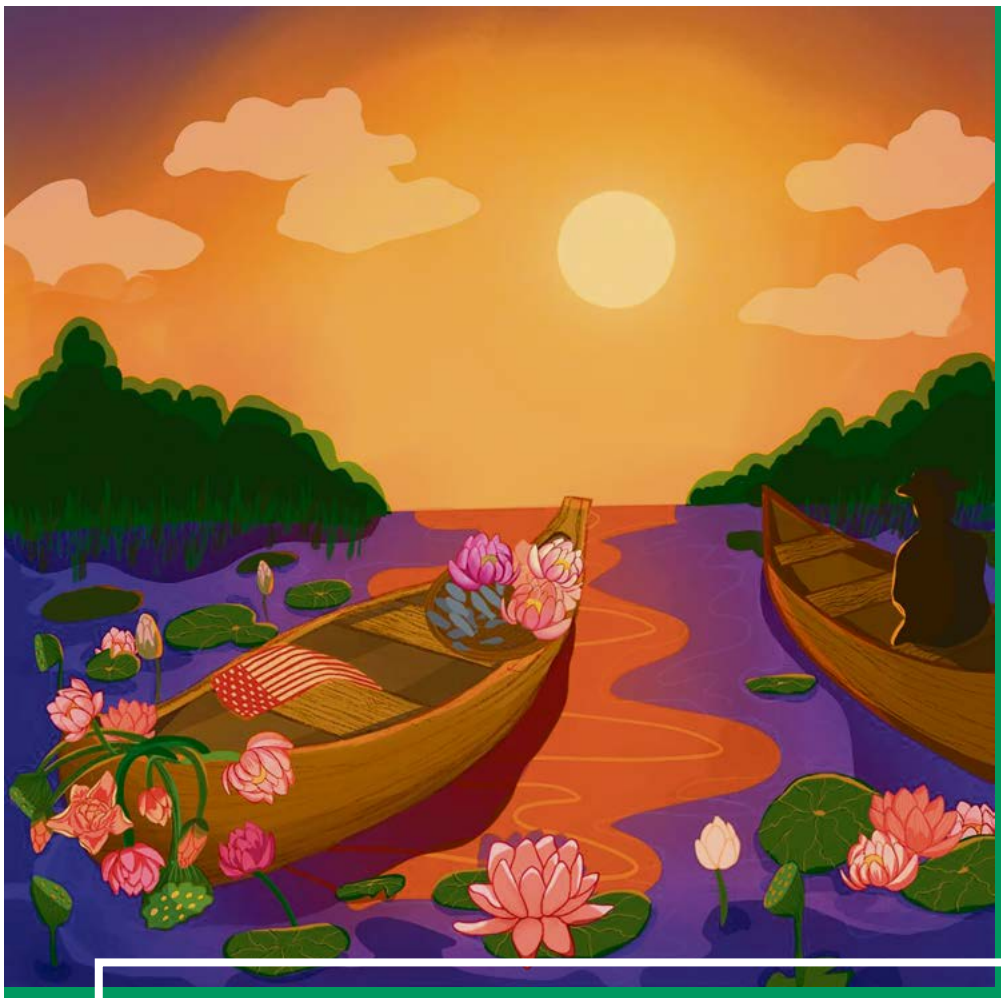
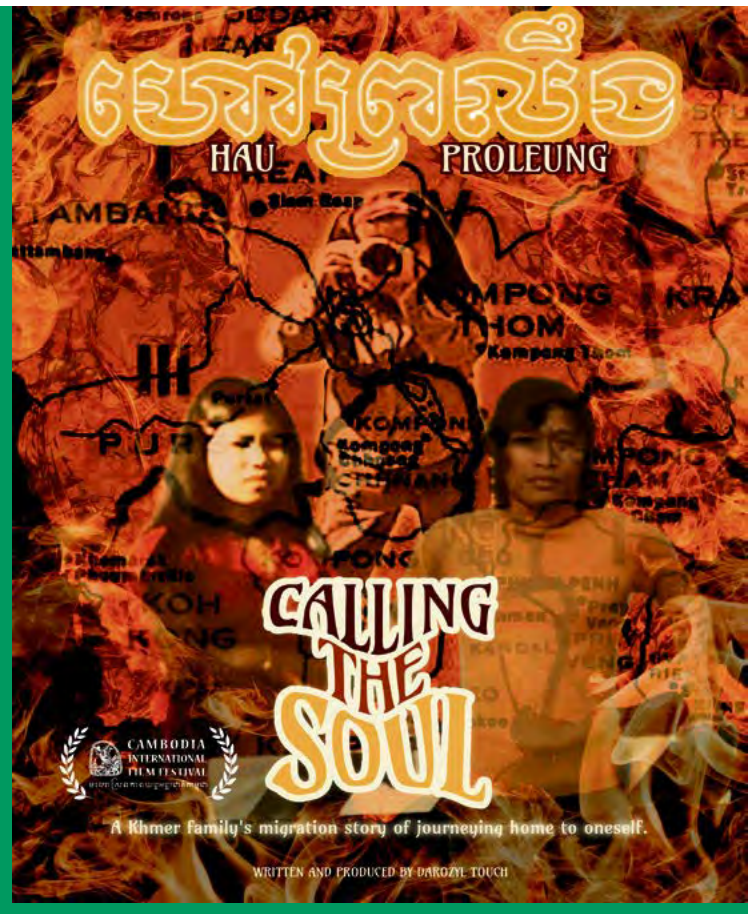


Fig. 1 (left): *Sok Sabbay Tham Phaluv* by Janhtria Sapearn. Digital exhibit artwork, Wing Luke Museum, 2023.

Fig. 2 (below): Bunthay Cheam, Sophia Som, and Darozyl S. Touch at opening exhibit of Sok Sabbay Tham Phaluv, Wing Luke Museum. Photo by Dene Diaz, 2023.

Fig. 3 (right): "Hau Proleung: Calling the Soul" by Darozyl S. Touch. Film poster, 2023.



ហៅព្រលឹង *Hau Proleung:* Calling Our Collective Souls Home

Darozyl S. Touch

The human body is a shell for the soul. It is a Khmer cultural belief that this body contains 19 different *proleung* – spirits or souls – connected to different parts. Unbeknownst to the keeper, when one navigates a life transition, personal hardship, illness, trauma, or anything that might rock one's stability and foundation – the *proleung* may wander and be left behind somewhere. This necessitates a Khmer ritual called, *Hau Proleung*, to call the soul(s) back and reintegrate what was lost.[1] The keeper may never be the same, but calling the soul back is a spiritual reunion with, and a mirror that reflects, the version of self that was present during that specific point in time. The keeper recognizes the figure in the mirror and affirms their experience, welcoming them to come back home to oneself.

This opening introduction to my multimedia storytelling project ហៅព្រលឹង *Hau Proleung: Calling the Soul* is a dialogical exchange that I believe is symbolic of the Khmer diasporic experience.[2] Khmers across the diaspora have lost parts of their *proleung*, whether consciously or otherwise.

April 2025 marks 50 years since the United States' imperial ambitions in Southeast Asia brazenly exacerbated the displacement of thousands of Khmer, Lao, Vietnamese, Iu Mien, Hmong and other Southeast Asian diasporans to scatter across the world by carpet-bombing our homelands into smithereens – aiding the same communist movements into power that they sought to destroy. Though the impact of US imperialist foreign policy in Southeast Asia could be the sole focus of its own piece – I frame this article with the most basic assumption that US foreign policy decisions during the Cold War era made an ineradicable impact on the future of Cambodia, its citizens, and their descendants. And we are *still* reckoning its total cost today.

It's been 50 years since April 17, 1975 – the beginning of an almost four-year genocidal regime led by the Khmer Rouge – and a day that has been memorialized in the blood of the Khmer diaspora, its impacts still present and imprinted intergenerationally in the psyches and physical shells of our people.

The further loss of both our collective and individual *proleung* is perpetuated when we are unable to name our truths and integrate the missing pieces of our history to build a shared foundation on which we can move forward.

We have many scholars to thank over the decades for the abundance of research uncovering the harrowing facts – but most pressing for me to highlight right now are the 1.5-[3] and second-generation Khmer healers, authors, and artists who are carrying forward the torch to heal from this past. Through the lens of a collective remembrance of our power, we are calling upon our courage to hope, to dream, to resist, and to survive. So how do we remember this past without letting it become the end or the beginning? How can such remembrance become a moment in the history of our diaspora's evolution? No matter which side you were on, everyone lost someone; everyone experienced movement and migration, whether within the country or outside of it. What is our responsibility to heal from the past to look forward to the future, educating our descendants of our true histories as a dialogical process of calling our hearts and souls back to ourselves?

Sok Sabbay Tham Phaluv សុខសប្បាយតាមផ្លូវ

The histories of Khmer peoples' migration across the globe in search of refuge is varied across time and space – no two stories are alike, although there are common threads. It was within this pre-text that a group of Seattle-based Khmer artists – Sophia Som,[4] Bunthay Cheam,[5] and me – dreamed up and materialized a multi-disciplinary storytelling project in partnership with the Wing Luke Museum[6]: *Sok Sabbay Tham Phaluv* សុខសប្បាយតាមផ្លូវ : [Fig. 2]. The project title – which translates into English as "May you be well and happy on your journey" – is a Khmer prayer or well-wish that is often shared between people upon departing. This supplication is bittersweet, as many have been forced to journey away from their homeland and build a new life elsewhere, becoming members of the diaspora. So, what then does it mean to be a member of the Khmer diaspora? What histories unite us? Divide us? What is home, and where do we find home? What is in our collective consciousness to heal in this lifetime?

We explored these questions and more through the original curation of interviews, archives, photographs, and videos to tell uniquely different stories about the Khmer diaspora – filled with vulnerability, curiosity,

and hope for our collective futures. Our exhibit showcase took place during the time of Pchum Ben in October 2023, a two-week period in which Cambodian Buddhists give offerings at the temple to commemorate the ancestors who have passed on. Not only is Pchum Ben a time for collective mourning in which we grieve and commemorate our ancestors. It is also a time for us to honor and take stock of their paths that paved the way for the journeys that have yet to be – and to recognize the power we may draw from, as the living.

My related film project, *Hau Proleung: Calling the Soul*, was created as an homage to the diasporic courage, bravery, and resiliency of my parents and millions of other Khmer peoples' will to survive, so that we – the generations beyond – may have a chance to thrive [Fig.3].

ហៅព្រលឹង *Hau Proleung: Calling the Soul*

In recovering a treasure trove of home video tapes and priceless archives, this project – or rather, journey – was already in the making 26 years ago during my first trip to Cambodia with my parents. In 1999, my father was faced with a terminal diagnosis of Stage IV Liver Cancer with a prognosis of less than a year to live. My mother took a leave of absence from work, and my parents collectively decided to spend that "last" year traveling as a family to journey back to their homeland – a place from which they had been torn through the ravages of war and genocide. They sought to educate me and traveled to the places that brought them memories of profound joy and, on the other end of the continuum, immense grief. Stories surfaced about what was left of the house my mother was raised in before they were forcibly displaced; where my father was one of two survivors in an ambush at the Khmer-Vietnamese border; the Kamping Puoy "Killing Dam" where my mother was separated from her family and forced to labor as a teenager; and so many more. Through an online exhibit in the form of two spatial timelines mapping locations significant to my parents, digital art pieces, poetry, and archival materials, a physical exhibit at the Wing Luke Museum, and an accompanying short documentary film, *Hau Proleung* synthesizes the complex histories of my parents' migration to the United States, delving into themes of death, rebirth, and transformation. The project is an expression of the depth of grief and loss on the continuum of unconditional love.

Through their stories, I wanted to illuminate the experiences of members of the Khmer diaspora and their migration journeys as they sought refuge in new lands from the civil war and genocide in Cambodia. What happens to a people when they are forced to leave their homes? How does their identity grow, evolve, shift, adapt to root in their new context? What parts of themselves, their identities, their histories, their experiences did they leave behind or repress to move forward? What must we collectively go back to recover to move forward?

My father left behind a personal archive. This included a journal he kept during the Cambodian Civil War (1970-1975) and during his brief time in a refugee camp in Chanthaburi, Thailand following the ascension of the Khmer Rouge. It also included letters written when he was living in the Camp Pendleton refugee resettlement camp in San Onofre, California and Fort Chaffee resettlement camp in Arkansas. As I pored over my father's archive, stories began to materialize and connect in a way I couldn't have imagined. I grieved for years thinking that all his history was lost when he died, but I came to realize that he had prepared me as well as he could with the items he left behind to find and connect the missing pieces.

One Hi8 videotape was *the* missing puzzle piece. In my quest to digitize the tapes, I unassumingly found the very last video recording my father left: a video in which my 11-year-old self recorded my father sharing unknown parts of his life history, giving his last words of advice to me, and offering one of his last wholesome conversations with my mother, in which he apologized for leaving her with the soon-to-be responsibility of raising a child on her own. The first time I laid eyes on that video, almost 20 years after it was recorded, it clicked for me that his audio would be the narration of his migration story in the short documentary I created. Meanwhile, my mother's story would be narrated by my interviews with her as she rewatched these home videos for the first time in decades.

Finding these treasures was like calling my soul back home to myself – uncovering parts of me I didn't know were missing. By reconnecting to these materials, I was intuiting on a deeper level the ancestral wisdom that was coming to surface about my parents' own untold stories. I floated through this energetically charged sea of emotions that consumed me for over two years of my life.

Soul Reflections

Two scenes from both the film and the exhibit so poignantly demonstrate this process of "*Hau Proleung*," or calling the soul back, through my parents' stories of returning to places in which they experienced great harm.

In 1999, my mother returned to Kamping Puoy Lake (also known as the "Killing Dam") – a human-made lake whose dam was constructed by thousands of forced laborers including herself – for the first time since 1979. Upon her return, she noticed the many visitors who frequented this dam and lake as a site of leisure – a site that she was forced to build with her own hands as a teenager, digging trenches one meter wide and tall each day while on the brink of starvation, many around her dying in the course of its construction. It was peculiar for her to see children and their families laughing while cooling off in the waters – to even see her own child laughing and playing in the waters – of a human-made lake that was soaked with the blood of the deceased. I created a visual piece from a photo my father captured of her looking out at the water, juxtaposed with her staring out at an apparition of her teenage self [Fig. 4].[7]

The image caption is a tanka describing the stories the water exchanges with her:

"I wonder if you
Recognize me standing here
Mourning that we've seen
The worst in humanity
And still have power to love."

In my father's collected journal entries (written in French) he recalls an ambush he survived, in which I was able to cross-reference his audio retelling of this story from his last video message, in addition to video footage I found of him revisiting significant battle sites in Svay Rieng with his old military friends for the first time since he left Cambodia in 1975.[8]

This moment was elucidated through one particular image of my father and his comrades laughing, drinking, and celebrating – juxtaposed with his journal entry recalling events from 1974 [Fig. 5]:
-Night of 26 to 27/03/1974 Explosion at 410BC ("battalion chasseurs" or infantry battalion), but I escaped it completely.

There remains only:
—the commander of 410BC
—a nurse
—one troop
—and me

friendly losses:
—30 killed
—15 wounded

losses:
—97 M16
—1 machine gun 50
(trans. note: 0.50 caliber)
—2 81mm mortars
—2 60mm mortars
—2 AN/PRC-25 radio sets
and other things"

The haiku caption of this visual piece reads:

"I look left and right
And wonder if they'll return
Or if I will, too."

Of the many tragic sentiments conveyed in this March 1974 journal entry, the most striking to me were the non-human "losses" my father recounted – weapons, artillery, and equipment that perhaps were purchased with the last bits of US government aid before Congress halted all funding in 1973, and further shifted the tides toward the Khmer Republic's demise. I wondered: how did my father re-experience these losses when he learned in more detail of these macro-level foreign policy decisions after fleeing to the United States, while reconciling that he survived a traumatic moment that also served as a testament to the felt global impact of those policy decisions at the micro-level? I'd imagine his cognitive dissonance to be consuming.

Both scenarios facilitated a recognition of and reunion with parts of them that necessarily had to be left behind to survive. The grief, the loss, the fear – if present – could not outweigh their will to survive in their younger selves. As my mother often stated in her interviews, she did not have the time to fully feel the breadth of the emotions that were swelling within her without the risk of dying. Now that they had triumphed against the odds, returned to these sites to recover their missing pieces, what did they see of themselves that they weren't allowed to before? What did they feel as they looked into the mirror, seeing their past, present, and future in the same reflection?

Collective Callings

It was a blessing for me to screen my documentary in Seattle, Washington, and in Phnom Penh at the 2024 Cambodia International Film Festival eight months later. I found that it truly was a healing and diasporic awakening experience for audience members to hear some of their individual families' stories told through the lens of my parents. They felt seen and affirmed as 1.5-, second-, and third-generation children who too were trying to do the work of preserving their families' histories. There was a resonance across audience members who also understood my film as a cautionary tale about the consequences of keeping these stories locked inside. In my artistic decision to walk the audience through my family's journey of healing grief through the reunification of self, I showed the vulnerabilities and mortality of humans who defied death itself but could not escape the weight of coping with that triumph. PTSD and addiction – as shown through my father's story – has the power to triumph at times. Consequently, what is our responsibility as the next generation of healers, artists, and educators to hold space for our elders, our peers, and ourselves to reckon with the complexities of calling our souls back? Especially when memories are filled with skeletons of the past that may be better off rotting in those rice paddies they traded for concrete jungles.

It's precisely the stories of how they survived against the odds that remind us of our collective power and right to transform from the state of surviving to thriving and reverse the long-term physical, psychological, and spiritual impacts of historical trauma. These stories illuminate that whether missing *proleung* or not, and despite inheriting intergenerational trauma, we are descendants of a spirit that is unbreakable, for our very existence – somewhere in our ancestral lineage – is against the odds. As my mother stated in her interview, "You have to be brave." After all, as she put it, it is only "because of the power of the Universe that I am alive today." I take that and the work that I create as a call to action to make every breath count, to be a seeker by calling our souls home for Khmer people to heal forward into the future.

Fig. 4 (above): "AQUEOUS EXCHANGE" by Darozyl S. Touch. Photo manipulation, 16"x12", utilizing photographs from 1982 and 1999. Wing Luke Museum, 2023.

Fig. 5 (right): "PAWN" by Darozyl S. Touch. Photo manipulation, 10"x8", utilizing undated photograph (est. 1973 or 1974), and March 1974 journal entry. Wing Luke Museum, 2023.

Darozyl S. Touch holds space for people to reclaim their power as a second-generation Khmer American educator, cultural artist, and healer – weaving Khmer ancestral knowledge, storytelling, plant medicine, and the transformative power of collective grief work in service of our intergenerational healing for a liberated future. She is also an Assistant Dean for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice in Seattle University's College of Arts and Sciences.
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Notes

1 Chouléan, A. (2005). Brah Ling. Reyum Institute of Arts and Culture; Thompson, A. (2005). *Calling the souls: A Cambodian ritual text = Le rapped des âmes: Texte rituel khmer*. Reyum.

2 Touch, D. (2023). *Hau Proleung: Calling the soul*. Explore APA Heritage. https://exploreapaheritage.vercel.app/Hau-Proleung-Calling-the-Soul

3 "1.5 generation" refers to the generation of young Khmer people either born in Cambodia or in the refugee camps, who fled as child refugees elsewhere, and were children raised predominantly in the new society. 1.5 generation refugees/immigrants generally have lived for much longer in the land they relocated to than the land from which they were born.

4 Sophia Som is a second-generation artist whose work includes 38 interviews exploring Khmer/Cambodian identity and heritage with Seattle community members: https://exploreapaheritage.vercel.app/i-am-cambodian

5 Bunthay Cheam is a 1.5-generation artist whose work includes eight short films that capture significant locations to the Khmer American community in Seattle: https://exploreapaheritage.vercel.app/sok-sabbay-tham-phaluv

6 The physical exhibit is on display at the Wing Luke Museum in Seattle, Washington: https://www.wingluke.org/cambodianculturalmuseum

7 An accompanying film clip of my mother recounting her visit to Kamping Puoy: https://exploreapaheritage.vercel.app/map/6uYqNXyi5W7YJC8tJCpcpJ#building-the-kamping-puoy-reservoir-through-forced-labor-as-a-teenager

8 An accompanying film clip of my father recounting his experience of the ambush: https://exploreapaheritage.vercel.app/map/4z1xsuz1lesJoBNE41CzNz#was-sent-to-fight-at-the-border-of-south-vietnam-and-cambodia

Women of Ink

The Power of Female Traditional Tattooists in Southeast Asia and Beyond

Talisha Schilder and Nadja Ritter

What is the role of women in tattoo revivals across globalising Southeast Asia? How are traditional tattooists more than artists? In this multivocal article, we address these questions and reflect on our ongoing photography project on traditional tattooists in contemporary contexts.

Practised among various Indigenous cultures, traditional tattooing is a manual tattooing process using hand-tapping or handpoke techniques, in which the tattooist rhythmically taps or pokes ink into the skin dot by dot, accumulating into lines and intricate designs.

At the International Conference of Asia Scholars 13 (28 July – 1 August 2024), hosted by IIAS and Universitas Airlangga in Surabaya, we curated a photography exhibition inspired by Talisha's Research Master's project "Reclaiming Inked Indigeneity in Indonesia". European colonialism, state-led modernisation, and capitalist market forces marginalised many tribal tattoo traditions. Mainstream discourse often emphasises their 'near extinction', while disregarding the agency and power of traditional tattooists.

This understanding motivated us to showcase a diverse selection of eight portraits captured by Nadja during the Borneo Handtapping Tattoo Weekend (BHTW) 2023,[1] foregrounding the stories of handtapping tattooists that revitalise tribal tattoo traditions from Mentawai and Borneo. Each portrait was accompanied by the tattooist's profile, drawn from semi-structured interviews. Together, these visual narrative elements offered visitors a glimpse into the life trajectories and independent research activities of traditional tattooists, highlighting the critical role of such artists in preserving Indigenous heritages while adapting to new contexts and meanings.

After the ICAS 13 exhibition, we joined the BHTW 2024 as event crew members, where we witnessed an interesting shift. While the first BHTW featured two female traditional tattooists, Tipung Puyang and Meraki Fade, the second edition saw greater participation of women. This reflects the rising role of women in traditional tattooing across globalising Southeast Asia – a shift that deserves more attention. Historically, many Indigenous tattoo traditions in Asia were either female-dominated or had a gender balance. These contrast sharply with the male-dominated niche of traditional tattooing in today's global tattoo industry. At the BHTW 2024, Nadja captured the portraits of all traditional tattooists involved. However, we wish to centre the power and agency of female tattooists in this article, inviting readers to connect with their stories as they challenge different power structures. We constructed the first-person narratives that follow from conversations with each of the female tattooists, based primarily on their responses to a set of open-ended interview questions, and with their explicit consent to write and publish these accounts.

Talisha Daisy Dionysius Schilder is a student researcher in the ResMA Asian Studies programme at Leiden University. Her critical ethnographic research explores contemporary practices of Indigenous tattoo traditions in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia. Email: t.d.d.schilder@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Nadja Ritter is a freelance photographer. In 2011, she obtained her degree in Photography "Abschlussklasse Ute Mahler" at Ostkreuzschule für Fotografie in Berlin (Germany). She documented Indigenous tattooing practices and lifeways in Mentawai and Borneo during the tattoo expeditions of her partner and Indonesian tattooist Aman Durga Sipatiti. Email: me@nadjaritter.de

Notes

1 The Borneo Handtapping Tattoo Weekend (BHTW), founded by Indonesian handtapper Aman Durga Sipatiti, is a unique event celebrating traditional tattooing as an alternative to the Westerncentric machine tattooing culture. As the only international tattoo convention dedicated exclusively to non-machine handwork, it aims to revive this ancestral art form in one of its places of origin—the rainforests around Kuching, Sarawak (Borneo). With a focus on community, local collaborations, and Indigenous rights advocacy, the BHTW transcends a typical tattoo convention, providing a global platform to honour tribal traditions.

Tipung Puyang

Born in Kota Kinabalu (Sabah, Borneo) and Indigenous to a Dusun village, I am a self-taught female tattooist. Mother's tribe: Lotud of Tuaran, keeper of grandmother's beads. Father's tribe: Tindal of Kadamaian, keeper of grandmother's trees. I started learning about traditional tattooing through my job at the Indigenous Peoples Network of Malaysia (JOAS). Since 2012, I have been a full-time Indigenous artist, travelling across Southeast Asia and Europe while selling crafts, performing arts and traditional music, hosting workshops, and running cultural projects. I embarked on my journey as a traditional tattoo practitioner in 2019. My tattoo work exclusively uses handtapping techniques and embodies the balance between humans and nature.

Traditional arts and tattooing are integral to my advocacy for Indigenous rights to ancestral lands and resources because Indigenous cultural practices are deeply intertwined with nature. The contemporary revitalisation of traditional tattooing is an important testament to our resilience to still exist and survive while adapting to the modern world with a sense of duty and honour. For Indigenous people in today's globalising world, contemporary art such as tattooing is our platform to voice and express ourselves as we did for centuries with our traditional arts. In the same way we use our music, dance, costumes, and crafts, our tattoos hold the knowledge, stories, and meanings relevant to our cultural survival today. We often speak of the Mother tongue, Mother Earth and Mother land. I feel, it is this feminine energy regardless of gender, that is reflected through my traditional tattooing practice.

Tipung Puyang is based in Orangutan Tattoo Studio in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. Her tattoo journal on Instagram is at @rainforest_ink.

Jean Sioson

Born and raised in the Philippines, I am proud to be the only female traditional tattoo practitioner in Manila. With over 15 years of experience, I practise handtapping tattooing while continuously researching Indigenous tattoo motifs in North Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao, especially those of the Moro and Manobo communities. I feel that I am here to serve a larger purpose than aesthetics or tattoo tourism. For me, traditional tattooing is an assertion of precolonial Filipino identity. Our ancestors' unique tattoo patterns and methods tell stories that bridge the past with the present. Preserving our ancestral tattoo traditions, heritage and culture can give us a sense of belonging and social values that makes us better people.

As I face the capitalist rat race in the big city and lingering colonial mindsets, a contemporary challenge for traditional tattooing in today's globalising world is balancing art, Indigenous culture, and consumerism. We can achieve this balance through ethical research, reciprocity, and respect for tradition. As a non-full blood Indigenous woman, my identity presented another challenge in this field. Despite my genuine passion and years of experience, some people questioned my authenticity. Instead of letting their negativity define me, I used it as a positive drive that helped me master my craft, travel the world, and connect with like-minded people. Over time, my traditional tattooing practice became authentic in its own way.

Jean Sioson is located in Pasig City, Manila, the Philippines. Her work can be seen on Instagram @jean_katributatu_mnl.

Nagaia

While there is a strong presence of women in the global tattoo industry, my direct work environment is still male-dominated. I am the only female Dayak traditional tattooist practising handtapping in Sarawak. After two years of self-taught tattooing, I took on a tattoo apprenticeship that led me to specialise in Iban [Dayak] Pua Kumbu tribal motifs from Borneo.

During my university years, I started tattooing all kinds of designs without a clear focus. That changed when my father critically asked me: "Why are you not tattooing our ancestral tribal motifs? We are Dayaks, native to Borneo. Why bother tattooing Western designs?" His words still echo in my mind. While Western tattooists create incredible Dayak tattoos, why should we, as Dayaks, not do the same? It is our birth right to preserve and share our ancestral tattoo tradition with knowledge passed down from our elders. I wish for more local and native women, including myself, to revitalise Dayak tattoo traditions respectfully and with proper knowledge. Unfortunately, I endured a great deal of heckling from men. Perhaps my traditional tattooing practice triggers male insecurities, but this is not my intention. I want all Dayaks to thrive together in the world of tattooing and make tribal Borneo great again, especially in its homeland.

Nagaia is based in Kuching, Sarawak, Borneo. Tattooing at Rakta Dhatu Tattoo, her work can be viewed on Instagram @nagaiatato.

Nessy Voon

In today's world, where people often come from mixed backgrounds or are born in places different from their ancestral roots, I hope my tattoo work inspires others to see that we belong to where we are born, regardless of race. I used to feel lost. I thought that I had no right to focus on Bornean motifs because I am pure Chinese. However, friends and peers reminded me that being born and raised in Borneo makes me Bornean. I specialise in handpoking Bornean tribal motifs with Chinese textile patterns, which reflects my identity as a Chinese-Bornean woman. My work embodies unity in cultural diversity, (re)connections with ancestral lands, feminine energy in nature, and collaborative learning.

Tattooing is not only art but also empowerment. In a traditionally male-dominated industry, I aim to challenge stereotypes and create a space where women can express their strength and individuality. I hope this article encourages more women to venture into traditional tattooing, without fear or insecurity about male opinions. Despite progress, it's still not always safe for women in the tattoo industry. I endeavour to build a safe space, not only for my female clients but also for new female tattoo practitioners. I don't mind being accused of favouring women or judged for creating such a space—if that's what it takes to make women feel safe and empowered, I accept the judgment.

Nessy Voon is based in Malaysia and is currently freelance tattooing and travelling between Kuching and Kuala Lumpur. She can be reached through Instagram @nessyvoon.

Zaneta – Historical Tattoo

Born in Świnoujście, Poland, by the Baltic Sea, I have spent the past 12 years specialising in bold, ornamental designs and handpoke tattooing. Baltic motifs stole my heart because they connect me to my grandfather, who was born in Lithuania. My artist name, Historical Tattoo, embodies the intersection of historical research practices—archaeological sites, archival materials, museums, and oral history—with my passion for ancestral heritages, cultural preservation, art, and identity celebration.

Science, tattooing, and art are a perfect match. With an academic background in biology, genetics, and medicine, I better understand the body and mind, enabling me to respond more effectively to my clients' needs. After completing my doctoral studies, I started travelling to find new historical inspirations and to meet tattoo masters from different countries. Observing them at work, I realised that tattooing requires constant learning and skills improvement. Combining historical and ethnographic research whilst learning directly from Indigenous tattoo masters allows me to merge motifs and shapes into endless combinations with the utmost respect for tattoo traditions and tribal agency. I aim to create my own (historical) tattoo language, primarily focusing on solid linework done without a machine.

The tattoo industry, particularly the traditional side, is often associated with masculinity. By occupying this space, I believe I contribute to broadening the scope of what tattoos can represent, not just in terms of design but in how they relate to identity, personal expression, and spirituality. Embracing femininity in my tattoo work, I hope to redefine what it means to be "feminine" in a space that has long been dominated by masculine codes.

Zaneta can be reached via Facebook ("historicaltattoo"), and her work can also be viewed on Instagram @historicaltattoo.

Luli

I have been a nomad and travelling artist for most of my life. Spirituality is at the core of my identity, approaches, artistic practices, and tattooing. I began my tattooing journey with an electric machine in 2010 but transitioned to handpoke tattooing during a trek in the Himalayas in 2017, where I connected with the spiritual power of the surrounding nature. For the past months in Borneo, I have been a handtapping tattoo apprentice under the guidance of Dayak and Mentawaian handtappers, and the Kenarau tattoo family who revive Dayak tattooing to resist colonial legacies. I also lived with the Lahanan tribe in Asap (Sarawak, Borneo) for a month, immersing myself fully in their cultures and lifeways.

Preserving Indigenous tattoo traditions today is crucial when tattooed elders can still share their stories. This belief drove me to initiate my Newar Tattoo Project in Bhaktapur, Nepal, in 2017, addressing the lack of archival materials and documentation. I aim to keep ancient tattoo patterns and traditions alive for future generations to connect to their ancestors' stories. I was born in Spain – a place without known tattoo traditions. Only with permission and by invitation of the local communities I lived with, I tattoo the ornamental designs, powerful symbols, and sacred geometry patterns from the Asian cultures I study during my travels across the region.

Luli spends her summers in Gudvangen Viking Village in Norway, where she exclusively performs traditional tattooing. Her work can be viewed on Instagram @luli_tattoo.

All Photography by Nadja Ritter, 2024

Fig. 1 (left): JAPON Cafe. (Photo courtesy of Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies, 2024)

Asian Studies in Lithuania: Unexpected Connections

Tomas Bedulskij, Karina Simonson, and Deimantas Valančiūnas

When thinking about Asian Studies in Europe, Lithuania is not usually the first place that comes to mind. And wrongfully so. Although Lithuania never had direct colonial or imperial ties to Asia, the Middle East, or North Africa, the interest in these distant lands and cultures existed for many years. Radvila Našlaitėlis, a cultural and state figure of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, made documented pilgrimage journeys to Syria, Palestine, and Egypt in the 16th century. The 19th-century Lithuanian nobleman Mykolas Tiškevičius sparked public interest in ancient Egypt after he participated in several archaeological expeditions there and even brought back some (albeit, fake!) mummies. The excitement about Asia – the thirst for knowledge and experience of the continent – also motivated Lithuanian traveller and intellectual Antanas Poška to overtake the journey on his motorcycle from Lithuania to India, which he reached in 1931.

Lithuania's interest in Asia has not faded away and continues today. Popular trends from Asia are now reaching Lithuania just as they are in other European countries. K-pop bands are played on radio stations, Korean cosmetics are popular in beauty stores, bubble tea shops are filled with teenagers, and the Lithuanian National Gallery is currently hosting an exhibition on the connections between Japanese traditional arts and pop culture. Thus, it is not a surprise that the continuous interest in Asian cultures in Lithuania materialised in a serious academic field. The Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies at Vilnius University is the largest and most diverse academic institution in Lithuania – or in any other Baltic state – that focuses on Asian and Middle Eastern cultures and societies. Even though the institute was established in 1993 (formerly called the Centre of Oriental Studies), the tradition of studying and researching Asia and the Middle East at Vilnius University began much earlier.

Vilnius University, founded in 1579, is among the oldest universities in Central and Eastern Europe and has played a vital role in Lithuania's political, cultural, and intellectual life. The early 19th century was a turbulent period for Lithuania. Following the third partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania became part of the Russian Empire, vanishing from the map for over a century. Nevertheless, some academic institutions, including Vilnius University, continued their activities, albeit under stringent Russian supervision. During this time, intellectuals at Vilnius University were keenly aware of the emerging significance and potential of Asian Studies. The initial romantic fascination with the East, fueled by informal student groups like the Filarets, Filomats, and Shubravcy, as well as Freemasonic lodges such as the Zealous Lithuanian Lodge, evolved into a serious academic engagement. The Department of Eastern Languages at Vilnius University was formally established in 1810, but the actual teaching did not commence until over ten years later when Arabic and Persian languages were incorporated into the curriculum. In 1822, Kazimierz Kontrym, a notable intellectual and adjunct at Vilnius University, presented a proposal to Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, the educational curator of the Vilnius District. Kontrym's proposal aimed to establish an institute for Oriental languages at Vilnius University, one that would offer instruction in Mongolian, Armenian, Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. Additionally, Kontrym sought to promote the study of Bengali, Sinhalese, Sanskrit, and other languages by sending students to India and Ceylon for further training.[1] His ambitious project, however, did not come into being at that time and had to wait for over a century to finally materialise into a proper department.

During Lithuania's interwar independence, Oriental studies received limited attention, sustained by a few dedicated scholars. Under Soviet control, Lithuanian universities could not establish Oriental studies departments, forcing enthusiasts to study in Russian institutions. The sole exception was a Sanskrit course taught by Ričardas Mironas (a distinguished Lithuanian linguist and translator) at the Department of Classical Philology at Vilnius University. After Lithuania regained independence in 1990, interest in Oriental studies revived. In 1993, Vilnius University founded the Centre of Oriental Studies to advance the study of Asian and Middle Eastern languages, cultures, and histories. A full-fledged Bachelor of Arts programme titled Comparative Asian Studies was started in 2000, offering four specialisation tracks: Arabic Studies, Chinese Studies, Indian Studies, and Japanese Studies.

Until 2018, the Center of Oriental Studies was an independent academic unit at Vilnius University. Following structural reforms implemented between 2015 and 2020, the Center and its study programmes were

Fig.2 (far left): Partisan marketing of an ATSIbusk event. (Photo courtesy of Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies, 2023)

Fig. 3 (left): Organisers of the ATSIbusk event. (Photo courtesy of Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies, 2024)

Fig. 5 (below left): Public lecture-workshop by a Japanese Zen Buddhist monk. (Photo courtesy of Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies, 2022)

integrated into the Faculty of Philosophy, changing its name and becoming the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies. This change indicates the constantly evolving nature of Asian Studies, as the institute's research focus now spans from ancient and classical texts and traditions to present-day socio-political realities. Thus, the institution has developed a holistic perspective with regard to cultural areas and their social, historical, and political specificity.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has resurfaced historical tensions with Lithuania's next-door neighbour. Lithuania's experiences under Tsarist and Soviet rule significantly shaped its perceptions of "Asia." Eastern Russia, associated with Siberia and broader Asia, was a site of exile and suffering for many Lithuanians, creating a lasting link between "Asia" and trauma in certain cultural and historical narratives. Also, Russia's vast geography, spanning Europe and Asia, complicates Lithuania's framing of "Asia." While Lithuania emphasises cultural and political distinctions from Russia, its proximity fosters awareness of Asia's geographic and cultural diversity. However, the focus remains primarily on Russia as a geopolitical adversary rather than its Asian dimensions. Meanwhile, Lithuanian scholars study Eastern Russia, including anthropologist Donatas Brandišauskas, who conducts research in East Siberia (Buryatia, Zabaikal Region, Yakutia) and the Russian Far East (Amur and Khabarovsk regions). Lithuania's foreign policy engagement with Asian nations, particularly China, Japan, and India, has also been an area of scholarly focus. For example, Lithuania's recent alignment with Taiwan and its tense relationship with China has sparked academic and public debates on the nature of Asia's role in Lithuania's global strategies.

Embracing diverse and interdisciplinary methodologies and approaches, the institute conducts research in two main areas: Cultural Studies of Asia and Anthropology of Asia. In the first research area, scholars investigate the distinctive forms of traditional and contemporary culture in various Asian countries and regions (South Asia, East Asia, Central Asia, Middle East). Drawing on multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary methods – including textual, historiographical, postcolonial, art-historical (visual and performative culture studies), and theoretical approaches – this research area seeks to identify and describe the dynamics of past and present cultural processes. These processes include the transformation of intellectual traditions, socio-political and glocalisation dynamics, and changes in religious doctrines and practices. It also critically assesses the re-articulation and diffusion of various artistic forms, such as literature, cinema, and performing arts. In the second research area, scholars dwell on theoretical and methodological approaches of sociocultural anthropology and focus on the comparative study of human societies. They analyse the peculiarities of cultural life across a wide range of social activities and organisations and carry out research using ethnographic methods and long-term qualitative fieldwork. Scholars in this research area specialise in different regions and conduct anthropological fieldwork in India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, China, Mongolia, Eastern Siberia, Jordan, Iran, Lebanon, South and North America, Eastern and Northern Europe, and Lithuania.

The institute also offers both undergraduate and postgraduate study programmes. The undergraduate Asian Studies programme offers five specialisations: Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies, Korean Studies, Middle Eastern Studies (combining the former separate programmes in Turkish, Iranian, and Arabic Studies), and Indian and South Asian Studies. The Bachelor's programme in Asian Studies integrates a multidisciplinary approach, drawing from diverse academic fields such as language, literature, religion, art history, anthropology, history, and philosophy. Although primarily grounded in these disciplines, the programme also seeks to incorporate interdisciplinary perspectives by integrating cultural and social studies where possible.

The Modern Asian Studies Master's programme aims to develop students' expertise in contemporary Asian cultures, equipping them with strong intercultural and transregional competencies. It offers a broad methodological foundation and an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating elements from area studies, gender and postcolonial studies, visual culture, comparative literature, and cultural psychology. The programme is designed to welcome students from a variety of academic backgrounds, encouraging diversity in thought and action within multicultural contexts. Doctoral studies in Ethnology are conducted as part of a joint initiative between Vilnius University, the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theater, and the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore.

Additionally, the School of Asian Languages within the institute offers beginner and advanced courses in Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Turkish to the general public.

The institute thrives on an exceptionally vibrant community life, largely driven by the active involvement of its students. In 2023, the student-led academic society "Undiscovered Asia" was founded, aiming to expand and share scholarly knowledge about the Asian region. This society has quickly become a vital part of the institute's academic and cultural landscape, fostering a deeper understanding of Asia through student-driven initiatives. In 2022, the student initiative "JAPON CAFÉ" was established. This community, created by Japanese and Lithuanian students at Vilnius University, offers unique opportunities to learn about Japan and Lithuania by directly experiencing both cultures. The café serves as a platform for connecting students from different nationalities, encouraging new friendships, and building a growing community of cross-cultural enthusiasts. Open to students from all faculties, JAPON CAFÉ holds monthly events, welcoming anyone interested in Japanese, Lithuanian, or broader cross-cultural experiences. An annual event, "ATSIbusk" (Eng. "Wake Up"), formerly known as "Orientalists' Days," has been a cornerstone of the department's calendar. This multi-day event features hands-on activities, competitions, lectures, and other community-building initiatives about Asia and the Middle East open to the university community and guests. The institute also organises a regular South Asian Studies Summer School. In 2023, it was dedicated to the topic of South Asia on the Move.

In addition to its dynamic community, the institute is deeply integrated into international academic networks. Many students participate in exchange and mobility programmes at various universities in India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Jordan, Oman, and more, and faculty members engage in teaching and research visits at partner universities. Vilnius University is part of a wide range of academic networks, including Erasmus+, ARQUS, ISEP, NordPlus, the Nordic Center in India, and the Baltic Alliance for Asian Studies, among others.

The diversity of cultural areas, topics, and methodologies makes the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies a fertile ground for the development of comparative, cross-cultural, and interdisciplinary research projects that fuse perspectives stemming from the humanities and social sciences. Today, the institute is one of the major platforms of research and studies of non-European cultures, and it functions as a facilitator of knowledge between different governmental and nongovernmental institutions. The 2021 Belorussian migration crisis in Lithuania showcased the lack of language and culture specialists in Asian and Middle Eastern countries, facilitating the need for Lithuanian institutions to cooperate with the institute in interpretation and cultural training. There are also other areas (e.g., foreign policy, security, development, etc.) where the institute's scholars can provide qualified expertise and assistance.

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Notes

1 Beinorius, Audrius. 2009. "Introduction: Tracing the bicentennial history of Oriental studies in Lithuania", *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia*, Vol. 10 No. 1-2.

Observing the Challenges of Regionalism in Northeast Asia from Comparative Perspectives

Two conflicting trends will determine the future of regionalism in Northeast Asia. One is the growing acknowledgment of the need for regional integration. The other is the rise of nationalism. Aware of the geopolitical uncertainties that make any roadmap for Northeast Asian regionalism tenuous at best, but also adhering to the belief that integration is crucial to the region's resilience, the "Mega-Asia Research Group" of Seoul National University Asia Center and the Institute of International Studies at Seoul National University co-hosted a conference entitled "Asian Regionalism from Comparative Perspectives." Held in the autumn of 2024, the event brought together Korean researchers of Asia's six different regions to discuss the current state of regionalism in each region, with the ultimate goal of gaining insights into the future of Northeast Asian regionalism.

The contributions to this issue of News from Northeast Asia were authored by the participants of this conference. A review of regionalism in the region is first presented by Chang Joon Ok of the Academy of Korean Studies in "Historical Development of Regionalism in Northeast Asia." This is followed by the proposal of a new region, and therefore the possibility of a new regionalism, by Jeong Yoon Yang of the National Security Research Institute and Beom Shik Shin of Seoul National University in "'Mega-Asia' and a New Regionalism: 'North Asia.'" The reality of regionalism in South Asia, West Asia, and Central Asia is discussed, respectively, by Yoon Jung Choi of Sejong Institute ("South Asia at a Crossroads: Navigating Regionalism Amid Historical, Structural, and Geopolitical Challenges"), So Yeon Ahn of Seoul National University Asia Center ("Traditional and New Forms of Regionalism in West Asia"), and Song Ha Joo of Kookmin University ("Emerging Regionalism in Central Asia"). Finally, ASEAN is often regarded as a viable and successful example of regionalism, but in "Regionalism in Southeast Asia: ASEAN's Potential and Challenges," Kyong Jun Choi of Konkuk University brings to our attention the limitations that must be overcome if Southeast Asia's regionalism is to advance to a higher level. These contributions illustrate the diverse forms of regionalism practiced in the Asian world. This, in turn, allows us to go beyond the fatalistic pessimism surrounding the topic of North Asian regionalism and to anticipate the emergence of a new form of regional integration in Northeast Asia.

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SNUAC
Seoul National University Asia Center

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

Historical Development of Regionalism in Northeast Asia

Chang Joon OK

The geographical definition of Northeast Asia includes six countries: the two Koreas, Japan, China, Taiwan, Russia, and Mongolia. However, if we define Northeast Asia "regionally," taking the dynamics of international politics into account, the United States can also be included. The United States' strengthening of its identity as an East Asian country is evidenced by the East Asia Summit, the Six-Party Talks, and the Pivot to Asia policy; therefore, it can be regarded as a part of Northeast Asia. Indeed, discussing the situation in Northeast Asia without considering US policy is impossible.

The situation in Northeast Asia is unique in that while the number of countries in the region is relatively small, the region includes many of the world's major powers: the United States, Russia, China, and Japan. Due to this reason, geopolitical competition between the major powers still remains strong in Northeast Asia, but compared to the other regions of Asia, regionalism in institutional terms is very underdeveloped. "Polarity," a key concept in international politics, can be used to examine the historical development of regionalism in Northeast Asia, the trajectory of which can be divided into bipolar, unipolar, and post-unipolar periods.

The bipolar order of the United States and the Soviet Union emerged immediately after World War II. In Northeast Asia, the civil war in China and the Korean War led to the collapse of the post-World War II US-Soviet "Grand Alliance." With the signing of the San Francisco Treaty (1951), China embraced the policy of leaning to the Soviet side while Japan embraced the United States . With China and Japan aligned with the Soviet Union and the United States, respectively, there was little room for Northeast Asian regionalism to be discussed.

Next came the unipolar order, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the establishment of US hegemony. Even before the unipolar order was established, the United States was already adjusting the San Francisco system that had excluded China and engaging with China through the normalization of US-China relations. During the US unipolar order, the regional concept of "Asia-Pacific," which was centered on economic cooperation, gained prominence. If, in the previous bipolar period, South Korea and Japan had played a central role in developing the concept of the Pacific as a means of attracting the United States, in this period, the United States also came to define itself as a member of Asia amidst the growth of East Asian countries such as the "Four Asian Dragons."

Lastly, there is the post-unipolar order. As US hegemony declines and China's rise continues, the unipolar order centered on the United States has begun to falter, ushering in the interregnum period, in which no new authority is created. The United States has put forward another regional concept, "the Indo-Pacific," to contain or blockade China. This new regional concept is aimed at strengthening cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India, facilitating the creation of a new bloc centered on countries with shared values. China, on the other hand, is trying to overcome containment through the "Belt and Road Initiative," which encompasses the Eurasian continent and the Indian Ocean.

Currently, South Korea has been active in improving relations with Japan while cooperating with the American-led Indo-Pacific strategy, while North Korea has chosen to stay close to Russia, sending troops to Russia in the wake of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Under these circumstances, it is very difficult for the countries of Northeast Asia to construct a shared identity. Indeed, the geopolitics of the United States, China, and Russia have come to accelerate the formation of blocs rather than foster regionalism.

There are several important variables that will come to determine the future of regionalism in Northeast Asia. The first is the direction and extent of U.S.-China competition at the global level. The second is regional competition between China and Japan. The third is the degree to which North and South Korea will play an active role as partners in that competition. Finally, the fourth is the degree to which Mongolia and Russia will be interested in regionalism as passive actors. While the order remains in flux, and regionalism in Northeast Asia may come to be swept up in great power geopolitics, the flip side is that the direction in which regionalism in Northeast Asia unfolds may determine the fluid shape of the post-unipolar order. This is why the changes and developments in Northeast Asia regionalism remain greatly important.

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"Mega-Asia" and a New Regionalism: "North Asia"

Jeong Yoon YANG and Beom Shik SHIN

The concept of "Mega-Asia" has emerged as a framework to capture the rising Asia of the 21st century. Asia is generally regarded as being comprised of the regions of West Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia. But what about the northern boundary of Asia? As we believe that this northern boundary also needs to be recognized and defined, we have given it a name – "North Asia" – and established the Ural Mountains as its western boundary. This means that some parts of Russia fall under "North Asia."

But then can we say that Russia is part of the "North Asian" region of Asia? Regions are processual outcomes that are shaped by various actors and are constructed through political processes. A region attains "regionhood" through discursive practices, undergoing the process of regionification. By acquiring regionhood, the "regionness" (the degree of internal interaction and cohesion as a unit) of a region is enhanced through political practices and interactions. Bearing in mind these material and ideological conditions for defining a region, it is therefore necessary to examine whether the "North Asian" region has the potential to acquire "regionhood" and "regionness" and thus become regionalized.

The term "North Asia" may be unfamiliar to many, but it does exist as a geographical region. In general, Russia is divided by the Ural Mountains, with Europe to the west and Asia to the east. Straddling the vast expanses of Europe and Asia, Russia has historically constructed its own regional identity in the space between Asia and Europe. The perception of whether it is a European or Asian country has shifted depending on where it has looked for its identity and models of national development.

In order to examine whether the North Asian region in Russia has been acquiring an Asian regionality through inter-regionalism or supra-regionalism, we need to analyze the changes that are being shaped and driven by spontaneous and bottom-up dynamics at the sub-regional level, the expanding connectivity of North Asia arising from the expansion of networks, and the process of North Asianization driven by national strategies. When economic and people-to-people exchanges in border regions are activated, resulting in more enhanced networks and greater subregional cooperation, the likelihood of regionalization and therefore the growth of the concept of "North Asia" may increase (the bottom-up method). The formation of the Northern Sea Route transportation network can also drive the formation of a "North Asian" region (middle method). Finally, the likelihood of a "North Asia" region is likely to increase when strong national interests in the formation of such a region emerge (top-down method).

Russia and East Asia are distant neighbors in terms of civilization, and from the perspective of identity and Russia as a whole, it is unlikely that Russia will integrate with Asia. However, if the Russo-Ukrainian war comes to an end and transnational networks are reactivated through people-to-people exchanges with Asian neighbors, such as the countries of the Far East, this may become a major mechanism for regional integration.

"Mega-Asia" and "North Asia" were established as new regional frameworks in the hopes that they could act as channels for resolving conflicts and contradictions within East Asia in the era of strategic competition between the United States and China. Within East Asia's current regional order, there are clear limitations in resolving issues such as the territorial conflicts inherent in East Asia, the North Korean nuclear issue, and the issue of US-China rivalry. In addition, a regional approach to "North Asia" provides the framework that has the potential to incorporate North Korea, an isolated authoritarian regime, into the region.

The regionalization of Asia through informal and open networks can enhance regional stability and mitigate conflicts in the region, as it can help to address regional security issues by forging ties between countries. Within the conceptual dynamics of "Mega Asia," the strategic value of the development of North Asian regionalization becomes clear.

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Fig. 1: The Europe-Asia boundary within Russia. (Photo courtesy of Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.)

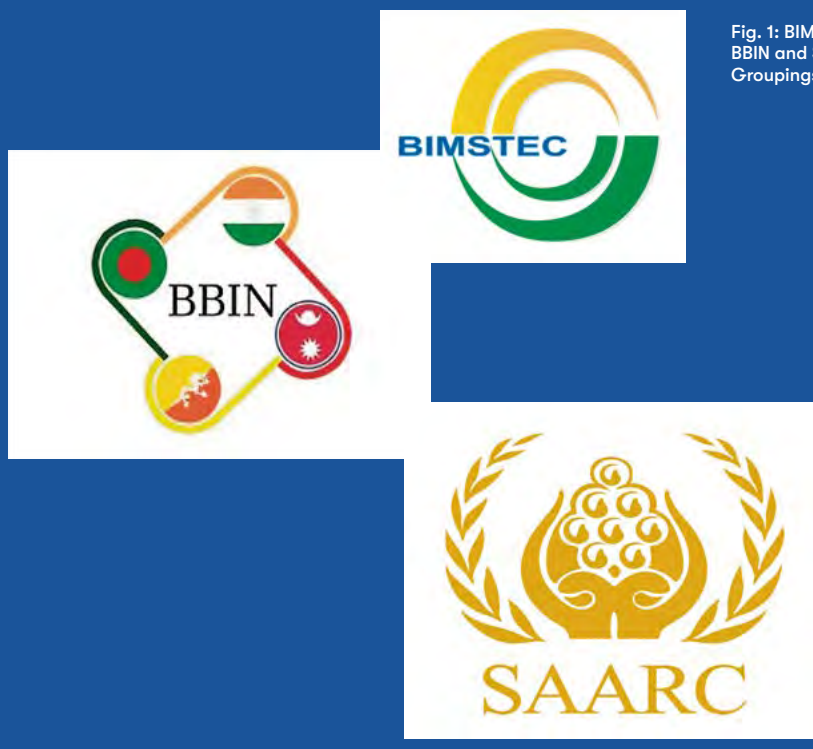

Fig. 1: BIMSTEC, BBIN and SAARC Groupings.

South Asia at a Crossroads: Navigating Regionalism Amid Historical, Structural, and Geopolitical Challenges

Yoon Jung CHOI

South Asia remains a region that has received relatively little global attention. Most countries in the region endured prolonged British colonial rule and are still grappling with nation-building and internal challenges decades after independence. Ongoing territorial and religious conflicts, particularly over Kashmir, have drained political and economic resources, further hindering regional progress. Economically, much of South Asia remains trapped in poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment. India stands out as an exception, having rapidly emerged as the world's fifth-largest economy. Meanwhile, external powers such as China and the United States have become increasingly influential, shaping South Asia's regional dynamics and cross-border cooperation.

Regionalism in South Asia is losing steam, weakened by historical and structural challenges. The idea of South Asia as a unified geographic and cultural entity, rooted in shared experiences like British colonialism, cricket, and Bollywood, has struggled to translate into effective regional cooperation. Structural barriers and geopolitical tensions have held back the vision of regional integration.

The creation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985 marked a significant step toward regional integration, but its progress has been hampered. Challenges such as the principle of unanimity, India's dominant position, and China's growing influence have rendered SAARC largely ineffective. Unlike ASEAN, the regional bloc of neighboring Southeast Asia, SAARC has delivered little tangible benefit to its members. Intra-regional trade accounts for just five percent of South Asia's total trade, a stark indicator of limited economic integration. Political frictions exacerbate this fragmentation: India's branding of Pakistan as a terrorist state, Pakistan's ban on Indian media, and declining people-to-people exchanges (including student mobility) have further eroded regional connectivity. India's closer strategic alignment with the United States has added another layer to the region's complexity, turning South Asia into a theater for US-China competition. While this shift has expanded South Asia's global relevance, it has come at the cost of regional cohesion.

The trajectory of South Asian regionalism will hinge on several critical factors: India's aspirations for greater global influence, the smaller states' deepening alignment with China, and the capacity of individual nations to drive functional initiatives amid intensifying geopolitical rivalries. Should security tensions rise and economic competition sharpen – particularly under the second Trump administration – functional regionalism may gain traction as states seek pragmatic alternatives to the status quo. This shift could represent a watershed moment for the region, moving beyond the constraints of essentialist regionalism, which relies on geographic proximity and cultural homogeneity, toward a more dynamic functional regionalism rooted in practical cooperation and shared objectives.

Groupings such as BIMSTEC and BBIN exemplify the "South Asia +/- x" model, reflecting the rise of new functionalist regional frameworks that break away from traditional notions of regionalism. These arrangements, along with emerging sub-regional groupings centered on India or Pakistan and composed of "like-minded" or "interest-aligned" nations, are gaining momentum. Though still in their infancy, these evolving forms of regionalism offer a glimpse into how South Asia might address the void left by the decline of multilateralism and conventional regional integration. They suggest a potential path forward for a fragmented region, seeking to redefine its role in an increasingly fluid and competitive geopolitical landscape.

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Traditional and New Forms of Regionalism in West Asia

So Yeon AHN

West Asia is a key strategic region, where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – a potential trigger for great international crises – is taking place and where several oil-producing nations crucial to global energy security are concentrated. West Asia is also a region of great civilizational significance, home to the holy sites of the major religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, West Asia experienced the domination of European powers and began to call for decolonization. The ideological platform used at the time to challenge and rally against Western colonization was pan-Arabism.

The Arab League, based on Arab ethnic identity, was formed to advocate for regional solidarity in West Asia. However, the diversity of political and economic structures and lack of institutional cohesion among member states hindered the Arab League's role as a regional organization. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – formed in response to the common security crisis of the Iranian threat following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and featuring member states with common political, historical, and economic backgrounds – is considered to have had success in regional integration, but the organization was short-lived.

The Arab Spring, comprising a wave of anti-government protests that marked a historic turning point for the entire region in 2010, was a defining event that demonstrated the futility of regional cooperation in the face of individual state survival. In particular, the US strategic contraction in the Middle East and the escalation of the US-China conflict, which coincided with the Arab Spring, set the stage for countries in West Asia, led by the GCC, to pursue their respective paths for survival. The GCC's break with Qatar signaled the end of GCC-led regional cooperation in West Asia. Then, the unconventional 2020 normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states confirmed the collapse of the ideological basis that had supported West Asian regionalism. The Israeli-Hamas war that erupted in October 2023 also saw West Asian states unite in condemning both Israel and Hamas simultaneously, but without the regional cohesion that had been evident in the past. Instead, it has been the non-state armed groups backed by Iran that have demonstrated strong cohesion in opposing Israel.

Today, a new form of regional cooperation, known as "minilateralism," is emerging in the West Asian region, in which small-scale cooperation is occurring between states with common interests in pursuing their national interests across factional and geographic borders. Compared to other regions, West Asia, with its longstanding cultural and historical commonalities, has been expected to demonstrate a cohesive regionalism. However, amidst the ongoing crisis of state survival, regional cooperation has yet to find its footing. Rather, West Asian regionalism is now breaking the mold of traditional regionalism by expanding its scope beyond common ideological or geographical borders, as states pursue their strategies for survival.

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Fig. 1: Emblem featured on the flag of the Arab League and map of the member countries. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons user Raffanumber24 and reprinted under Creative Commons license.

Emerging Regionalism in Central Asia

Song Ha JOO

The five states of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) have continued to make efforts toward regional integration since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Despite this, Central Asian regionalism and cooperation remain stagnant, with regionalism in Central Asia being deemed a failure by researchers and the media alike. However, since the death of Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov and the inauguration of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in 2016, the beginnings of a change in Central Asian regionalism have been observed.

Recent developments in the region since 2016 suggest that regionalization is on the rise. On the political front, there have been improvements in bilateral relations, including the demarcation of borders between Central Asian countries and the expansion of economic cooperation. Above all, the "Consultative Meeting of the Central Asian Heads of State," held annually since 2018, has come to serve as an informal platform for dialogue, thereby promoting cooperation between the countries. Notably, all the countries in the region have continued to participate, including Turkmenistan, which had previously pursued a policy of isolation. Economically, trade between the Central Asian countries remains insignificant compared to trade with Russia, China, and Europe, but it is clearly on the rise. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have resumed energy trade, and Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are seeking industrial cooperation along their border. In terms of people-to-people exchange, the countries in Central Asia are moving toward visa-free agreements and more open border policies.

Despite these changes, however, the limitations that hindered regionalism and regionalization in Central Asia in the past continue into the present day. First, the Central Asian states remain highly conscious of external actors such as China and Russia and have continued with active attempts to make connections with these external actors. Since the "Consultative Meeting of the Central Asian Heads of State" also allows the Central Asian states to meet and connect with a variety of external actors, such as Russia, China, the EU, the Gulf states, and Turkey, it may in fact function as a centrifugal rather than centripetal force in terms of Central Asian regionalism. Furthermore, the "Consultative Meeting" remains limited in that it is an informal platform for dialogue and not an institutionalized formal regional organization. Second, economic interaction within the region is still limited compared to other countries and is unlikely to increase in the future. While the absolute volume of trade between the Central Asian countries has increased since 2016, it is still small compared to the volume of trade between the respective countries and China or Russia. The similar nature of the economic structures of the Central Asian countries means that the potential for greater intra-regional trade is low. Despite these limitations, changes in regionalism and regionalization in Central Asia have come to be observed in recent years, indicating that this phenomenon cannot be ignored. In Central Asia, informal dialogue platforms, such as the "Consultative Meeting," have been more successful than pre-existing institutionalized regionalist bodies of a binding nature in contributing to regionalism and regionalization. This suggests that different forms of regional institutions can play a more effective role in regionalism depending on the specific context of the region.

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Fig. 1 (below left) Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Photo by Anton Rybakov on Unsplash.

Fig. 2 (below): Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan. Photo by Григорий Захарьян on Unsplash.

Fig. 3 (bottom): Baiterek Tower. Astana Kazakhstan. Photo by Travel With on Unsplash.

Regionalism in Southeast Asia: ASEAN's Potential and Challenges

Kyong Jun CHOI

Southeast Asia, in contrast to the other regions of Asia, has actively pursued regional integration through the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Although its institutional nature is different from that of the EU and the level of integration is not as high, most of the countries in the region (10 countries) are members of ASEAN, and the organization has provided the basis for joint cooperation with countries outside the region. The evolution of ASEAN shows how a group of newly independent and relatively weak states that value their sovereignty have endeavored towards regionalism against the backdrop of internal and external security, economic, and regime-related crises and conflicts.

ASEAN was formed as a security response to the spread of communism during the Cold War and evolved by adopting the strategy of leveraging offshore powers while promoting regional cooperation to address the internal and external security and economic challenges of its member states. ASEAN has continued to promote regional cooperation and expand its membership amidst globalization, the China threat, the East Asian financial crisis, and the US-China conflict. In this process, ASEAN has succeeded in promoting both internal integration and external expansion by maintaining the internal principle of respecting the sovereignty of regional states while at the same time asserting ASEAN-centrality. ASEAN is not a highly politically integrated organization with some ceded sovereignty like the EU; rather, ASEAN features a unique decision-making process based on consensus among sovereign states, emphasizing the rights of sovereign states. But this emphasis on the principle of sovereignty has resulted in institutional inefficiencies. Along with growing conflicts and security threats among offshore powers and weak economic cohesion and external dependence among regional states, these have acted to constrain ASEAN's ability to fulfill its role as a unified actor in the international community and to further advance regional integration in Southeast Asia.

ASEAN has demonstrated limitations and challenges in maintaining and applying its principles and methods, particularly in terms of security, economics, and human rights. There are rifts in the organization's response to security issues, epitomized by the South China Sea dispute, and the issue of security conflicts among ASEAN countries remains. ASEAN does not want any offshore power to organize or lead multilateral security arrangements in Southeast Asia. However, it has yet to pursue a specific and unified foreign strategy toward these offshore powers, with member states adopting diplomatic strategies such as individual hedging instead. Despite the growing economic importance of Southeast Asia and the pursuit of regional economic cooperation through the signing of free trade agreements, the fragmentation of economic structures among the region's countries persists. Differences in political systems, ranging from democracy to authoritarianism, and disagreements over how to approach human rights issues, coupled with the ongoing US-China conflict, have also exposed the problem of regional fragmentation. These factors have come to constrain regional stability and integration, making it difficult for ASEAN to effectively engage with external actors, and they have also contributed to internal divisions. Such limitations must be overcome if Southeast Asia's regionalism, led by ASEAN, is to advance to a higher level.

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Fig. 1 (above): Map showing the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). (Figure courtesy of Wikipedia Commons user Hariboneagle927, public domain)

Doing History of Childhood in China

While the history of childhood is attracting more scholarly attention in the Anglophone academia in the past few decades, it is still in its infancy in China. This does not mean that scholars in China are "lagging" behind the trend in the Anglophone world. Instead, it reveals different academic traditions and approaches to the question of childhood in history. Although few scholars in China label themselves as historians of childhood, substantial research has been conducted on children and childhood under the rubrics of literature, education, the history of family, and women's and gender history.

About a decade ago, Ping-chen Hsiung, a pioneering scholar of childhood in Chinese history, reflected that Chinese Childhood Studies were particularly well-equipped to challenge the notion of a "universal childhood" as part of the ideal of "general humanity,"[1] for much of the European-American theorisation of childhood and children cannot be unproblematically transplanted and applied to the Chinese context. Building on Hsiung's observation, this edition of China Connections aims to explore both "Chinese childhood" and the ways in which Chinese scholars approach the issue of childhood in other socio-cultural contexts.

What is the current state of the field of childhood history in China? What are the key concerns of the Chinese practitioners in this area? These questions guide the contributions to this collection. Xin Xu provides a brief overview of the study of children in ancient China, with a particular focus on the uses of material culture to reconstruct the historical reality of children in the past. Similarly, Gao Zhenyu outlines the development of childhood studies as a distinct discipline in early 20th-century China. Cai Danni, on the other hand, focuses on a more specific case: literate girls' epistolary service in wartime China, which offers the reader an instructive window into the inner world of children during the late 1930s and the 1940s. Finally, Li Shushu explores the representation of children in contemporary Chinese and Anglophone literature to reflect on the notion of childhood innocence. Collectively, these contributions demonstrate the diversity of approaches to the study of children and childhood in China.

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Notes

1 Ping-chen Hsiung, *A Tender Voyage: Children and Childhood in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 185.

Fig. 1 (right): Mirror featuring bamboo horses, China. Bronze, diameter 13.8cm, Tang Dynasty (618-907). On loan to the Tsinghua University Art Museum. Photo taken by XIN Xu during the exhibition *All Things in Full Reflection: The Culture and Art of Ancient Chinese Bronze Mirrors* (2021).

Children in Ancient China: An Overview of Historical Realities and the Historiographical Research

XIN Xu 辛旭

Comparing childhood in world history, Peter Stearns has argued that China was a patriarchal society during the "classical civilization" period. The Chinese parenting style, which was based on maternal devotion and filial piety, fostered adult attachment to children, with a depth surpassing that of Greco-Roman civilization.[1] In terms of personal development, in contrast to India, which is also part of the "Eastern civilization," China encourages children to follow the crowd, while India focuses on nurturing the imagination of its youth.[2] As the 'schoolchild' increasingly becomes the epitome of modern childhood, this concept of childhood has also been embraced in modern China. Through both formal and informal education, China is establishing a new concept of children as citizens of the nation-state. While Stearns' description captures certain historical realities of Chinese children, it lacks a comprehensive understanding of the rich and varied historical images of children in ancient China. This also points to the inadequacy of current research on the history of Chinese children.

The image and real-life experiences of children in ancient China have been widely documented in various prescriptive medical texts, educational texts, biographies, literature, and family records. Visual media such as paintings, sculptures, and tomb landscapes have also testified to the public visibility of children. For example, children's games since the Qin (221- 206 BCE) and Han (206 BCE - 220 CE) dynasties have been conceptualized under the term "children's play" (*erxi* 儿戏) in various contemporary texts. Toys such as bamboo horses (*zhuma* 竹马, see Fig. 1) and bird carriages (*jiuche* 鸠车) featured extensively in pictorial representations, archaeological artifacts, and other material objects. The bustling scenes of children peddling toys along the streets are vividly depicted in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) painting "Peddler of Toys." During the Song and Ming (1368-1644) Dynasties, "Children at Play" paintings (*yingxi tu* 婴戏图), which depicted the pure and joyful nature of children at play, became widely popular and were a preferred choice for congratulatory gifts. In the field of medicine, from the Han and Jin (265/266-420) Dynasties into the Song Dynasty, *youke* (幼科 pediatrics) gradually evolved into a specialized field distinct from adult medicine.

Despite the growing presence of children in visual arts and the medical field, a continuous "belittlement" of children in daily life has persisted, including the colloquialization of "pediatrics" to *xiao'er ke* (小儿科 literal meaning: kid's play) and the evolution of the term erxi into a colloquial phrase suggesting trivial things not to be taken seriously. The coexistence of these phenomena indicates the complexity of the ancient Chinese conception of children. This complexity also inspired ancient Chinese philosophers to explore the philosophical meanings of the concept of children at an early stage. Both Laozi's concept of "returning to infancy" (*fugui yu ying'er* 复归于婴儿) and Li Zhi's (李贽, 1527-1602) "*Tongxin shuo*" (theory of the child-like innocence 童心说) emphasize the innate goodness and innocence of children. Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200) similarly encouraged children to engage in "useless activities" (*wuyi zhishi* 无益之事), emphasizing the difference between the simple and innocent nature of children and the adult world's focus on "benefits" (*liyi* 利益) and "utility" (*gongyong* 功用). On the other hand, Xunzi (荀子, 300 – 230 BCE) included children in his theory of inherent evilness (*xing'er lun* 性恶论). He believed that the only way to eliminate the possibility of people acting recklessly was to teach them proper rules and rectify their manners from birth. Although both Xunzi and Mencius emphasized guidance and education, Mencius believed that the motive for learning stemmed from the innate goodness of human nature, whereas Xunzi's emphasis was on "discipline." These diverse understandings of human nature shaped the various parenting methods in ancient China. For example, the upbringing of the Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao 程颢, 1032-1085; Cheng Yi 程颐, 1033-1107), prominent Confucian scholars of the Song Dynasty, became a paradigmatic narrative of Confucian child-rearing. However, they themselves believed that "children are like

Fig. 2 (left): *Children at Play*, Anonymous artist, Song Dynasty. Cited from *Song hua quanji*, Vol. 6 No. 1, Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2008, p. 186

puppies," implying that naturally unruly children needed to be disciplined to cultivate their proper morality.

As Stearns has pointed out, childhood life is intimately connected to the realm of education. In ancient China, children began their education either through home schooling or by attending private schools, government-sponsored primary schools, and other educational institutions. Before the Tang Dynasty (618-907), there were no specific learning materials prepared for children. Both children and adults used the same educational materials, including *zishu* (character books 字书) for literacy instruction, *mengshu* (enlightenment books 蒙书) for intellectual and moral education, and *jingshu* (classical texts 经书) as textbooks on Confucianism. According to various documents unearthed in Dunhuang, a distinction was made between adults' and children's learning materials as early as the Tang Dynasty. Three main categories of children's textbooks were developed: literacy, education, and practical application. Under each main category, there were various subcategories. For instance, under the literacy category, there were textbooks such as *A Thousand and Three Hundred Words Essential for Daily Use* (*Xinji shiyong yaozi yiqiansanbai yan* 新集时用要字壹仟叁佰言), which solely focused on literacy; *Essential Instruction for Opening the Mind* (*Kaimeng yaoxun* 开蒙要训), which contained rhymes and coherent sentences for literacy instruction; and *Surname Recognition* (*Xingwang shu* 姓望书) that used surnames for learning to read. With the invention of the printing press and the establishment of modern public school education systems, not only did the quantity of children's textbooks increase, but the knowledge categories also expanded, gradually evolving into modern educational materials for systematic learning. Because of the richness of primary sources, children's education has received significant scholarly attention and emerged as one of the most important areas of research in the history of Chinese children.

There is no doubt that the global circulation of modern perspectives on children contributes to the effort to separate children from the adult world as a group with distinct characteristics. During the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912), missionaries who established charitable institutions such as orphanages observed the widespread phenomenon of infant abandonment and infanticide. During the May Fourth era, John Dewey visited China, and his advocacy of child-centered learning was widely embraced across various sectors of Chinese society. In the Republican era (1912-1949), the elite began to promote child-centered initiatives through literature, scientific education, scientific childcare, healthcare, grassroots charity for children, and school education, thus integrating children's welfare into the process of building a modern nation-state.

The late Qing and Republican eras not only left a wealth of historical documents directly related to children, but also witnessed the birth of the earliest child-centered academic research in China. Notable scholars in psychology research included Ling Bing (凌冰, 1894-1993), Huang Yi (黄翼, 1903-1944), Guo Renyuan (郭任远), Xiao Xiaorong (萧孝嶸, 1898-1970), Zhu Zhixian (朱智贤, 1908-1991), and Liao Shicheng (廖世承, 1892-1970). In the medical field, exemplary figures were Fan Quan (范权, 1907-1989), Zhu Futang (诸福棠, 1899-1994), Deng Jinkan (邓金鉴, 1908-1973), and Wu Ruiping (吴瑞萍, 1907-1998). Chen Heqin (陈鹤琴, 1892-1982) and Tao Xingzhi (陶行知, 1891-1946) were leading figures in the field of education, while Zhou Zuoren (周作人, 1885-1967) dedicated himself to children's literature. All of them had studied overseas. Their research not only established the modern professional system of child studies in China across four domains – child psychology, child education, children's literature, and pediatrics – but also contributed to the global theories of childhood. Zhu Futang's discovery of the role of placental extract in preventing measles, for instance, benefited children worldwide.

Since Philippe Ariès brought children into the field of history,[3] the history of Chinese children has also attracted historians' attention globally. In the 1980s, Western Sinologists, such as Anne Behnke Kinney, began to trace the real-life experiences of children in ancient China.[4] Chinese historians followed suit, not only introducing Western theories of children's history into their research but also incorporating archaeological discoveries and historical documents to reconstruct the material environment, social life, and representation of children in ancient China.

Overall, the history of children and childhood remains a relatively new research field within Chinese academia. While there have been some studies, they mostly involve adding children into existing historical narratives. The existing Chinese scholarship has not treated children as proactive agents in their own right, nor has it explored the concept of childhood from the perspectives of class, gender, and race. This has resulted in a lack of thorough understanding of children and childhood in ancient China. However, as John Dardess has pointed out, "as a topic for scholarly inquiry, the history of childhood in China has a shallow past, but surely a promising future."[5] To turn this promising future into reality, it is crucial to first have a comprehensive understanding of the origins, development, and current status of this field. Additionally, it is important to establish a theoretical framework that can inspire different research questions and provide alternative interpretations.

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Notes

1 Peter Stearns, *Childhood in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 25.
2 Ibid., 30.
3 Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. R. Baldick (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1962).
4 Anne Behnke Kinney (ed.), *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).
5 John W Dardess, "Childhood in Premodern China," in Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner (eds.), *Children in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 91.

Childhood Studies in Modern China: A Half Century's Development

GAO Zhenyu 高振宇

In China, the formal study of childhood first emerged in the early 20th century. This foundational effort set the stage for evolving societal perspectives on childhood and brought significant improvements in the welfare of China's child population. Western ideas and concepts related to the field of childhood studies, introduced through European and American missionaries and Japanese scholars, gradually took root in Chinese academic circles. Despite challenges from political turmoil, communication barriers, and limited access to resources, Chinese scholars produced both comprehensive and specialized studies on children and childhood. Childhood research groups and institutions dedicated to childhood studies were established, while academic journals published a substantial amount of research papers. The development of modern Chinese childhood research peaked in the 1920s and 1930s, even as interests in childhood studies waned in Europe and America. Thus, modern Chinese childhood research significantly contributed to the global child-study movement, and its continuing advancements have played a vital role in the sustainable development of the field internationally.

Historical sources suggest that the development of childhood research in modern China can be roughly divided into three stages. The first stage, which I call the "Sprouting and Preparation" phase, developed out of the efforts of European and American missionaries and Chinese missionaries influenced by them. Although not all efforts focused specifically on children or childhood research, they contributed to the dissemination of foundational concepts and published some of the first works on related research subjects in China. These efforts spurred interest among China's emerging intellectual class, bringing attention to modern academic disciplines. The primary methods of dissemination included: (1) establishing new educational institutions to provide specialized courses or creating new medical facilities to conduct practical training, (2) publishing textbooks and other learning materials to support the education of children, and (3) systematically promoting the concept of childhood research by establishing journals and magazines. For example, Western missionaries and their religious schools were the first to introduce child psychology to China as a subfield of psychology. A notable example is the establishment of St. John's College in Shanghai in September 1879, where Yan Yongjing (颜永京,1838-1898), a Chinese pastor and president of the Anglican Church, taught psychology using his own translation of the American book *Mental Philosophy* (*Xinlingxue* 心靈學).[1] This is arguably the first textbook on modern psychology published in China. While it did not specifically address the idea of childhood studies, its content laid the groundwork for subsequent studies in child psychology.

Research on children in China was also notably influenced by Japan. Japanese scholarship on children had provided Chinese scholars with extensive knowledge of the history and the development of childhood studies, particularly in Europe and America, shaping early impressions of the field and laying the groundwork for its further development. For example, in the field of child education, the earliest theoretical works were translated from Japanese by Wang Guowei (王國維, 1877-1927) and others. Examples included *Education* (*Jiaoyuxue* 教育學) by Tachibana Sensaburo (立花铣三郎, 1867-1901) and *Textbook of Education* (*Jiaoyuxue jiaokeshu* 教育學教科書) by Makise Goichiro (牧漱五一郎, 1866-1920), both of which were translated by Wang.[2] In the field of child psychology, Japanese academics also played a key role. For instance, *Lectures on Psychology* (*Xinlixue jiangyi* 心理學講義), written by Hattori Unokichi (服部宇之吉, 1867-1939), a psychology instructor at Beijing University's Normal School, presented the latest advancements in Western psychology and may be the first Japanese psychology publication in early 20th-century China.[3]

The study of children first attracted the attention of the Chinese academic community between 1904 and 1906. In 1904, *Educational Vocabulary* (*Jiaoyu cihui* 教育辭彙), compiled by the Japanese Academy of Education and translated by Xu Yongxi (徐用錫, year of birth and death unknown), introduced representative figures in child psychology to China for the first time.[4] In 1906, Miao Wengong (繆文功 1871-1944) emphasized the need for educators to study child psychology in his book *The Latest Textbook of Education* (*Zuixin jiaoyuxue jiaokeshu* 最新教育學教科書), arguing that education must be grounded in human nature.[5] According to Miao, to educate without understanding human nature was like a quack doctor treating a disease he did not understand or a blind person riding a steamboat or a car without seeing its mechanism. Miao stressed that, since education was rooted in psychology, teachers should have a solid grasp of child psychology and that viewing children's minds solely from an adult's perspective would only lead to partial understanding and, ultimately, to inadequate education. In this first stage, while Chinese academics started to work on building native childhood research systems, they were still in the stage of imitating foreign scholars or introducing Western research findings. Nor did they have much real-world experience, and they had not yet forged strong relationships with child service initiatives in China.

Writing Letters for Soldiers: Literate Girls' Epistolary Service in Wartime China

CAI Danni 蔡丹妮

Writing letters for seniors was a common theme in epistolary primers for young students in the first half of 20th-century China. These popular instructional models capture the immediate experience of many literate boys and girls of the day, who contributed to their families and communities through their voluntary epistolary service. Indeed, the existing real-life stories of these warm-hearted young authors demonstrate the agency of youth, challenging mainstream narratives that depict children as immature or incapable.[1] The extensive biographical literature and records I have collected for my ongoing project about letter-writing children in modern China suggests that many young students, especially girls, assumed the task of writing letters for wounded soldiers during China's War of Resistance against Japan (1937–1945) and the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949). Although some letter-writing stories have been rediscovered by scholars to highlight Chinese women's wartime contribution,[2] most participants' accounts of their epistolary service remain largely unknown to the public. By uncovering some of these long-hidden stories, this article highlights the letter-writing girls in wartime China to further illustrate how epistolary literacy elevated Chinese girls' roles in broader sociopolitical communities and enabled them to become powerful subjects.

Liu Taozhen 劉桃貞 (1919–?) was one of these letter-writing girls, as recorded in her later essay.[3] She was a progressive member of the Communist Party-led "Chinese Liberation Pioneers Squad" (*Zhonghua minzu jiefang xianfeng dui* 中華民族解放先鋒隊) from Sanyuan 三原 Female Middle School (Shaanxi Province). In 1938, during the early stage of the War of Resistance against Japan, Liu worked together with her teachers and other students to raise money and sew quilts and clothing for wounded soldiers. The group also assisted wounded soldiers with writing letters home to their families.

One 19-year-old soldier was injured so badly that none of the students initially volunteered to write a letter to his family. However, Liu Taozhen stepped forward to apologize for not attending to his needs earlier, and she eventually helped him write two letters: one to his parents and another to his new bride. The latter was especially tragic: the soldier urged Liu to help him convince his wife to find another healthy husband because of his grave injuries during the war. Liu was initially concerned about her ability to complete such a challenging letter, but since she could not bear the disappointed look of a helpless soldier who had lost his arms and legs, she nevertheless agreed. She listened to him with respect and patience, as a professional scribe would do to his customer in the marketplace. To avoid breaking his bride's heart, they decided to hide the brutal fact of his disability by fabricating a story that he had joined the "Death Squad," which positioned him in extreme danger at all times. Liu read her draft aloud to confirm that her letter conveyed his "genuine feeling" (*zhenqing* 真情) and communicated his request for their breakup in the gentlest language. She perceived this letter as more of a literary creation because of its sophisticated rhetoric of affection and devotion. She might have also achieved a sense of pride from the compliments she received from the soldier, which she vividly recalled many years later: "You are among the school children (*xuesheng wa* 學生娃) but act like a fortune-telling master (*suangua xiansheng* 算卦先生), holding the power to fully draw out what is really in a person's heart. Your teachers are really good at educating students." By comparing Liu to a fortune teller, a category of professional scribes from which Liu drew inspiration, the soldier acknowledged her knack for written communication and her professional ethics.

Fig. 1 (right): Bilingual descriptions of Chinese girl guides' epistolary service for wounded soldiers in a hospital of Shanghai from *The War Pictorial* 戰事畫刊 (dated 1937). These letter-writing girls were deemed admirable by the general public for their courageous service and portrayed as exemplars of civilians. Photographs of such care were not unusual in wartime magazines to demonstrate the spirit of the whole country passionately united against Japan. (Image courtesy of Shanghai Library)

The second story of comforting injured soldiers took place in Nanchang (Jiangxi Province) during the Chinese Civil War (ca. 1948). Lin Mianqian 林緬芊 published an article about her letter-writing experience in hospitals in the *Modern Children Magazine* 新兒童.[4] She was among 30 female students from three local girls' schools whose primary objective upon arriving was to help the soldiers write letters home to their families.

Lin started her journey with excitement, but she was soon saddened by the inhospitable conditions these soldiers suffered. Three of the ten wounded soldiers whom Lin helped left a strong impression on her. The first

In the second stage, a significant body of childhood studies literature emerged, including original works by Chinese researchers as well as translated works from Europe, America, and Japan. Zhu Yuanshan's (朱元善, 1856-1934) *Childhood Studies* (*Ertong yanjiu* 兒童研究) (1915), for instance, could be considered the first Chinese work on childhood studies.[6] Although it did not address foundational theories or frameworks, Zhu's work explored three key topics: children's personality and developmental characteristics, fatigue theory, and imitation theory. Translations of works on childhood studies from Europe, America, and Japan also introduced Chinese readers to the history and theories of childhood. Between the 1920s and the 1930s, for instance, the works of Seki Hiroyuki (關寬之, years of birth and death unknown) have been widely translated into Chinese.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Chinese scholars such as Ling Bing (凌冰, 1894-1993), Zeng Zuozhong (曾作忠, 1895-1977), Yao Zhibi (姚枝碧, year of birth and death unknown), and Feng Pinlan (馮品蘭, 1894-1984), also began producing original works that reflected Chinese perspectives on childhood studies. Ling Bing, in particular, developed his own concepts on childhood studies during a series of lectures at Nanjing Normal University's summer school. These lectures were then compiled into a book in 1921, and subsequently revised and republished in 1932 and 1934. This work, ultimately published in four editions, was the most influential work on childhood studies in Republican China. It predated the formal release of many Japanese works and other translated texts on childhood studies, and no comparable Chinese text existed at the time Ling's book was published. Ling's work thus marked an original contribution to the field and the beginning of Chinese childhood studies. Subsequent scholars frequently referenced Ling Bing's writings in their works on childhood studies. Zeng Zuozhong's *Childhood Studies* (*Ertongxue* 兒童學) (1926), for instance, further expanded and enhanced the framework of Ling, covering topics such as historical perspectives on children, scientific approaches for studying children, children and genetics, children's instincts, the intellectual and moral development of children, crime, play, language acquisition, and the application of children's knowledge.[7] These additions significantly enriched the research about child psychology.

The final stage, which I will call the "Advancing amidst Twists and Turns" phase, witnessed a downturn in childhood studies, with a marked decline in research output. However, this did not signal a complete halt in the field. It was evident from a few published works that academics were still actively building and developing childhood studies. Dong Renjian's (董任堅, years of birth and death unknown) *Outline of Childhood Studies* (*Ertongyanjiu gangyao* 兒童研究綱要) stands out as a key contribution.[8] In the preface of his book, Dong stated that it was intended for parents, education students, and child teachers. The book consisted of four chapters – "Organic Foundation," "Children's Impulses and Activities," "Social Environment," and "Discipline for Children" – divided into thirty-eight sections, each with an outline, a research plan, and a list of references. Focused on a comprehensive, realistic view of the full child, Dong's work aimed to encourage adults to value child education and avoid outdated perspectives, using scientific knowledge to foster empathy and manage situations with children. Supported by research materials from the American Childhood Studies Association, it further expanded the existing research framework by addressing childhood studies from psychological, educational, and societal perspectives. Although it did not offer a systematic disciplinary framework, it contributed to refining the content structure established in earlier stages. A limited number of scholarly journals also published articles on childhood studies, exploring the field's history, methodologies, current state of development, and emerging themes in greater depth.

In conclusion, the development of childhood studies in Republican China underwent a complex, multi-phase evolution that reflected broader societal changes in the ways children were perceived, valued, and supported. This progression underscored an increasing recognition of the importance of childhood to the larger social and economic fabric of China, highlighting a growing sense of urgency around the need to provide children with necessary resources and support. Each stage of research on children in China was marked by representative scholars, publications, research groups, and journals and newspapers that collectively advanced the field. Despite its relatively late start and the disruption of the Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War, research on children and childhood persisted and made remarkable global contributions during the interwar period and the post-war era. Childhood studies remains a promising field in contemporary China. As such, it offers a rich foundation for further research with important implications for the future of Chinese children and the society in which they are growing up.

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Notes

1 Yan Yongjing, *Xinlingxue* (Shanghai: Yishishuhui, 1889).
2 Tachibana Sensaburo's *Jiaoyuxue* was published in the journal *Jiaoyu shijie* (教育世界) in 1901 and Makise Goichiro's *Jiaoyuxue jiaokeshu* was published in the same journal in 1902.
3 Unokichi Hattori, *Xinlixue jiangyi* (Tokyo: East Asia Company, 1905).
4 Xu Yongxi, *Jiaoyu cihui* (Beijing: Jingshi daxuetang yixueguan, 1904).
5 Miao Wengong, *Zuixin jiaoyuxue jiaokeshu* (Shanghai: Wenming shuju, 1906).
6 Zhu Yuanshan, *Ertong yanjiu* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1916).
7 Zeng Zuozhong, *Ertongxue* (Beijing: Beijing minguo daxue tushuguan, 1926).
8 Dong Renjian, *Ertong yanjiu gangyao* (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1948).

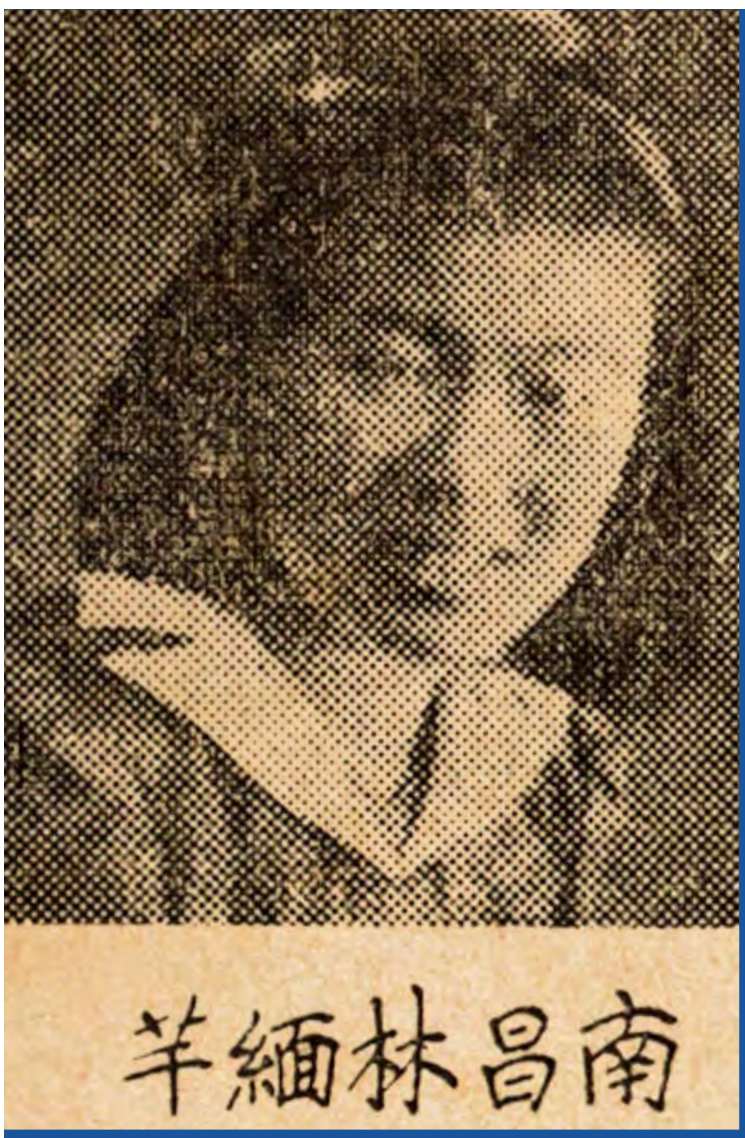

Fig. 2 (left): As an earnest reader of the *Modern Children Magazine*, Lin Mianqian sent her photograph (dated 1949) to the magazine for publication. (Image courtesy of Shanghai Library)

young soldier from Henan sought to write a letter home to his mother, who was desperate for his pay and provisions to make ends meet. However, he was so upset that Lin could not understand his accent that he lost his temper. Instead of feeling annoyed or flustered, Lin showed sympathy for his physical pain and emotional distress, apologizing to him and asking a translator for help to finish the letter. Another soldier from Guangdong proclaimed that he was also in need of help; nevertheless, he complained that he was not able to communicate with the visiting students since he did not understand the Mandarin they spoke. Luckily, Lin understood Cantonese and willingly took over the task of helping this soldier, who had not returned home in three years, compose a letter to his uncle requesting medicine. Both soldiers seemed satisfied with Lin's efforts of turning their vernacular language into written words, as they expressed their gratitude to her in the end.

The third soldier, whom Lin deemed "eccentric," wanted Lin to ask his father to pick him up from the troops because he was uncomfortable with what he described as the troop's "dark side." Despite this request, Lin heeded her teacher's request that negative comments about the war or battlefield conditions should be avoided in letters. She thus took the liberty of excluding the soldier's disturbing description once she confirmed that he was illiterate. Lin felt an enormous sense of unease for censoring this part of the letter, especially because he seemed to place great trust and expectations on her. Considering Nanchang, where Lin resided, was under the administration of the Nationalist government when she volunteered her services as a letter writer, it is likely that the soldiers Lin helped were enrolled in the Nationalist Forces, and she was politically sensitive about the low morale of the troops fighting for the Kuomingtang. She concluded her journey by observing that Chinese soldiers endured the most hardship of any people in the world and hoped that the Nationalist government would increase their remuneration.

Stories of girls writing letters for wounded soldiers across the country abound in contemporaries' memoirs, essays, diaries, photos, and other forms of documentation. These stories, either narrated by girls themselves or recorded by other witnesses, demonstrate the important political and emotional role of young female letter writers in wartime China, which has often been critically overlooked. As Nicole Barnes suggests, educated young women's wartime "emotional labor," such as writing letters for soldiers, created an intimate connection between two populations who would otherwise have had few opportunities to meet and share personal details: female students of the urban middle class and male soldiers from poor villages.[5] Although few sources suggest that these schoolgirls and wounded soldiers continued their conversations after they parted, the heartbreaking scenes during their epistolary service must have been indelibly imprinted on the minds of most girls. The task of fostering communication between soldiers in the field and their families from afar presumably reshaped the sociopolitical consciousness of literate girls, especially those from affluent families. More notably, the two letter-writing girls in the aforementioned stories, Liu Taozhen and Lin Mianqian, showed their determination to gain recognition for these underprivileged soldiers. This determination prompted them to overcome various difficulties, such as dialect barriers, fears of soldiers' bloody bodies, and soldiers' quick tempers. The acquisition of epistolary literacy actively empowered these school girls and gave them confidence and courage in their ongoing endeavour to serve their country.

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Notes

1 Danni Cai, "Power, Politeness, and Print: Children's Letter Writing in Republican China," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 13.1 (2020), 38–62.
2 For example, Nicole E. Barnes, *Intimate Communities: Wartime Healthcare and the Birth of Modern China, 1937–1945* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), 81–84.
3 Liu Taozhen, "Wo zai kangri hongliu zhong chengzhang" 我在抗日洪流中成長 [I grew up in the wave of resistance against Japan], in *Qinli kangzhan: Beijing jiaoyujie laotongzhi kangzhan huiyilu* 親歷抗戰：北京教育界老同志抗戰回憶錄 [Personal experiences in the Anti-Japanese War: The memoirs of veteran comrades involved in education in Beijing], ed. Zhonggong Beijing shiwei jiaoyu gongzuo weiyuanhui (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2005), 331–334.
4 Lin Mianqian, "Weilao shangbing ji" 慰勞傷兵記 [A record of comforting wounded soldiers], *Modern Children Magazine* 22.3 (1949): 36–37.
5 Barnes, *Intimate Communities*, 81–84.

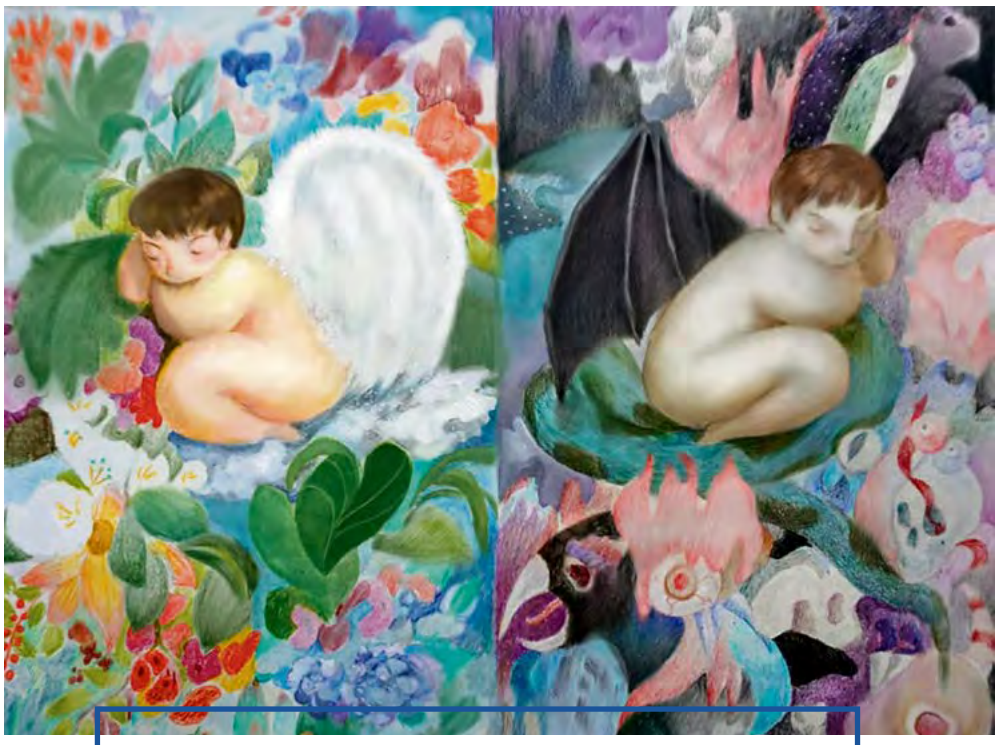

Fig. 1 (left): The discussion of human nature ultimately concerns new born babies. *Untitled*, Anqi Chen, watercolour and coloured pencils, 7.95×6.35cm, 2018, private collection of the author.

Revisiting Childhood Innocence

LI Shushu 李书纾

Although the theory of childhood innocence predates the Romantic Movement (1780-1830) in Europe and spans across multiple cultures,[1] there is no doubt that key tropes in Romantic philosophy, literature, and art at the cusp of the modern industrial age played a significant role in its renewal and global dissemination through Western imperialism. In China, even before the thinker Li Zhi 李贽 (1527-1602) formulated the notion of "childlike innocence" in his essay "The Theory of the Childlike Innocence" (Tongxin shuo 童心说, 1590), Taoist belief had revered childhood innocence in texts such as the Tao Te Ching 道德经 (571-471 BCE). Hence, the idea that children were inherently "innocent" in their characters and perceptions became part of the broad understanding, construction, and defence of the child and the stages of childhood development in both Eastern and Western cultures.

Scholars have, of course, criticised and rejected the idea of childhood innocence as it evolved and spread across different cultures. Strains in the perception of children's innocence become particularly acute when linked to other "Romantic" characteristics and to certain ancient Chinese folklores recording oddities and interactions with spirits. While in some texts and accounts of childhood, these spirits are seen as metaphors for the visionary-imaginative capacities of childhood that inevitably fade away as children mature, these representations can also slip into much darker portrayals strongly associated with the Gothic themes of children interacting with evil or occult forces.[2] Even if we interpret this solely in psychoanalytic terms, as has been attempted at critical junctures, the proximity between radical innocence and radical wickedness becomes unsettling, casting further doubt on the durability and authenticity of the "innocent child." These anxieties, of course, do not account for the thankfully rare yet shocking instances of children associated with sometimes monstrous transgression and crime.[3] The loss of innocence sometimes underscores children's vulnerability and the understanding that their purity cannot be guarded forever.

Questions of childhood innocence also shape the representations of children in literature. In the 20th century, the trend of presenting children as "darkened," evil, corrupted, and monstrous has become increasingly salient in different cultures through literature, video games, films, TV programmes, and digital media.[4] It is also interesting, in this context, to observe the trend of transporting "darkened" children from the lines of fantasy novels to screens. Adapting literary works for other platforms also returns to existing and older literary traditions. In the Chinese context, after *The Journey of Flower* (*Huaqiangu* 花千骨) was adapted into a TV series in 2015, the genre of "Immortal Arts Literature" boomed in China's film and television industries. *The Journey of Flower* recounts the story of Hua Qiangu, a young girl with extraordinary powers who, despite her love for her master Bai Zihua, a powerful immortal, is fated to become a demon god, forcing them into a tragic struggle between love, sacrifice, and the struggle between personal passion and duty. These works often follow a similar structure, in which the central characters are born with natural talents, evil powers, or even mental disabilities, lacking perceptions from the six senses. While growing up, these characters come into contact with an Immortal Sect and begin cultivating the Immortal Arts. At the same time, they are tasked with killing demons and monsters and maintaining the world's peace. However, due to their extraordinary and abnormal origins, they eventually become entangled in the liminal spaces between good and evil. Although they all become infected or possessed by evil influences in this borderland location, they are ultimately freed either through death or by purging the evil influences and returning to their previous state as Immortals or ordinary people.

The literary genre of Immortal Arts was influenced by earlier Martial Art Literature, Chinese legend, myth, and religion. However, the first modern appearances of the concept came from literary works, film, TV, as well as video games at the end of the 20th century.[5] For example, the video game Legend of Sword and Fairy (*Xianjian qixia zhuan* 仙剑奇侠传) was first released in 1995 and was later adapted into a TV series in 2005. As the game continued to be updated, sequels to its first TV series were subsequently produced in 2009 and 2016.

In the 21st-century Anglophone world, there has been a trend of revisiting or repurposing "darkened" children from earlier or existing fantasy works in TV series and films. These "darkened" children include not only the monstrous or demonised children seen in Chinese Immortal Art literature, but also children who are experienced beyond their years. Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (hereafter HDM) (1995-2000), for instance, was adapted into a TV series in 2019 and 2020, following a critically disparaged 2007 Hollywood adaptation of its first volume. In public commentaries, Pullman has clarified that HDM was conceived as a literary and imaginative intervention, deliberately engaging with the complex lineages and legacies of "Romantic Innocence." Influenced by William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley, Pullman portrays his central protagonist, Lyra Bellaqua, as valuing both the stage and condition of childhood innocence and the gifts it undeniably bestows upon children, while also affirming and embracing the inevitable end of innocence, as the world of adult opportunity, responsibility, and desire beckons young people at adolescence.

A similar theme appears in the recent fantasy film *Come Away* (2020). Although not directly adapted from a specific literary work, the film is inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, with Alice and Peter Pan as central characters. Before the accidental death of their brother David, neither Alice nor Peter Pan wanted to grow up. The family is devastated by grief after David's death: their mother drinks heavily, and their father accumulates severe gambling debts. To save their family, Alice and Peter set out on an adventure to London. In the face of these harsh truths, both Peter and Alice realise that it is time to grow up. Eventually, they succeed, but Peter chooses to remain a child in Neverland, offering to visit the family from time to time. Much like Immortal Arts Literature in China, children take on responsibilities at a young age and face the dangers of the adult world. In their adventures to protect the world or their family, these children inevitably lose their innocence, becoming wiser but fundamentally changed. These responsibilities, imposed by adults, pull them out of an Arcadian childhood, pressing them to grow up quickly.

The concept of "darkened" or evil children carries symbolic meanings in both literature and real-life contexts. Karen J. Renner examines portrayals of evil children in literary works, films, and TV series, categorising them into six groups: "Monstrous Births," "Gifted Children," "Ghost Children," "Possessed Children," "Ferals," and "Changelings."[6] James Garbarino studies how children lose their innocence and accumulate experiences in real life, including those affected by trauma, political violence, displacement, abandonment, extreme poverty, war, and child abuse.[7] Further research is needed to explore the various meanings of childhood innocence in these turbulent and often menacing settings.

Of course, the evil or "darkened" children discussed here and in other literary works cannot fully represent all childhood experiences, and it is important to avoid overly pessimistic or fatalistic accounts of adult-child interactions and relationships. While children may have been routinely ignored in history, in modern times they are supposedly valued and protected as part of the advancement of international human rights. However, it is crucial to remember that not all children receive the warmth and care of parents, teachers, siblings, or peers, nor the peace that such initiatives assume and promote.

Fig. 2 (right): The protective wall of childhood will eventually be broken by the outside. *Untitled*, watercolour, Anqi Chen, watercolour and coloured pencils, 25.84×20.81cm, 2018, private collection of the author.

Fig. 3 (right): As the Victorian philosophers and writers described, the protective wall of childhood will eventually be eroded by the cruel adult world, and children have to face this dark world early. *Untitled*, Anqi Chen, watercolour and coloured pencils, 25.2×20.32cm, 2018, private collection of the author.

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2 Renee Simmons Raney, *Hairy, Scary, but Mostly Merry Fairies!: Curing Nature Deficiency through Folklore, Imagination, and Creative Activities* (Montgomery: NewSouth Books, 2017), 18; Karen J. Renner, *Evil Children in the Popular Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 6.

3 Eric Ziolkowaski, *Evil Children in Religion, Literature, and Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 5-6; David Oswell, *The Agency of Children: From Family to Global Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 143.

4 Renner, *Evil Children in the Popular Imagination*, 1.

5 Zhange Ni, "Xiuzhen (Immortality Cultivation) Fantasy: Science, Religion, and the Novels of Magic/Superstition in Contemporary China," *Religions* 11.25 (2020), 12.

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7 James Garbarino, *Children and the Dark Side of Human Experience: Confronting Global Realities and Rethinking Child Development* (New York: Springer, 2008).

Aeromobilities from a Global South Perspective

A Symposium Reflection

René Catalán Hidalgo

In a conversation during my fieldwork at the Santiago de Chile International Airport, an air traffic controller told me: "Commercial aviation is quite impressive because it's one of the few activities where we as humans reach an agreement." However, this global universality also obscures a series of cracks that have been appearing throughout the development of aeromobility worldwide. To discuss these cracks, the symposium "Aspirational Infrastructure Research: Mobilities, Airports, Place (AIR-MAP)" was held in Seoul on October 24-26, 2024, with support from Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA), IDE-Jetro, and the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI). The symposium was nested within the Global Mobility Humanities Conference, titled "Mobilities, Aspirations, and Affective Futures," which was co-organized by the Academy of Mobility Humanities at Konkuk University, the National University of Singapore, and the International Institute for Asian Studies. This symposium brought together junior and senior researchers whose work focuses on airports in different cities of the Global South, covering different regions of Asia, Africa, and South America.

Personally, this symposium began at the start of last year, when different people spoke to me, encouraging me to submit an abstract and participate. The invitation sounded interesting, considering that aeromobility is not a topic that attracts much attention within the anthropological discipline, nor in the Chilean or South American context, at least from the perspective of the social sciences and humanities. This symposium represented the possibility of meeting people from different parts of the world with research interests similar to mine, which provided a unique opportunity to talk about these topics. So, I contacted Benjamin Linder, one of the organizers at the International Institute for Asian Studies, whose enthusiastic response was key in encouraging me and making me seriously consider the trip from Santiago to Seoul.

Santiago de Chile is 18,343 kilometers (11,398 miles) from Seoul, but since there are no direct flights, the trip must be made through the United States or Australia, in a journey that exceeds 30 hours (37 hours in my case, with layovers in Panama City, Houston, and San Francisco). But this geographical distance has not prevented South Korea from earning a special place among Chileans, whether because of K-Pop or K-Dramas. This made the destination immediately interesting, inviting me to explore the different possibilities the city offers to travelers. Thus, everything came together to make this experience a great opportunity in different ways, and in retrospect, I can say that both the city and the symposium exceeded my expectations.

First, Seoul itself is an amazing experience. Having been fortunate enough to visit different cities in South America, Europe, and the United States, I would say that none of them managed to captivate me in the way this city did: the interweaving of different historical moments that can be seen, the appeal of its corners, the dizzying nature of its public spaces, the attention to detail in public spaces and in services, the delicious and diverse food, along with the mystery of immersing yourself in a completely unknown language and yet still being able to navigate it quite well. All of this made me fall in love with this city, which I hope to return to soon, even if I have to face again what it means to be twelve hours ahead of my own time zone.

Regarding the symposium, it took place over three days, beginning with a field visit to the surroundings of Incheon International Airport led by Kaya Berry. This visit allowed us to recognize how airport infrastructure reconfigures its human and more-than-human environment through the development of various related services such as transport from the city, commerce, and hospitality, in addition to the traces they leave through their own materiality. Along with this, this visit allowed us to put faces to names and share as a group, thus facilitating the discussions that would take place during the four sessions on Friday and Saturday. The first day ended with an opening cocktail party and a musical performance, which also served as a first encounter with the hospitality of the host institution, Konkuk University, where the university students had a central role that extended throughout the rest of the event.

The second day began with the inaugural lecture by Professor Katarina Damjanov, who presented "More-than Planetary Futures: Infrastructural Capital and the Makings of a Lunar Frontier." This day featured two AIR-MAP panels, the first with research by Krittika Uniyal in Nepal, Elizabeth Ann Fretwell in Senegal, and Khidir Marsanto Prawirosusanto in Indonesia. The second panel, sponsored and organized by IDE-Jetro, featured the work of Hiroshi Ikegami in Taiwan and Kiyoyasu Tanaka in Nepal. This second day ended with a dinner at a restaurant near the university and, later, a pleasant conversation at the restaurant of the Riviera Hotel, the main hotel of the conference.

The third and final day began with Professor Bradley Rink's lecture, entitled "Drawing a Future Breath: Hope, Ambition, Mobility, and Their Consequences." The third AIR-MAP panel was held afterwards, where research by Champaka Rajagopal in India, Dato Laghidze in Georgia, my own work in Chile, and Juan Miguel Leandro Lim Quizon in the Philippines was presented. Finally, the fourth panel, funded by the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI), featured research conducted by Alejandra Espinosa Andrade in Ecuador, Ahmad Baydoun in Lebanon, and Zakir Hossain Raju in Bangladesh. This day and the conference as such concluded with a banquet held in one of the university's halls.

Regarding the conference as a whole, it had a total of twenty panels that addressed various perspectives on the phenomenon of mobility, mainly around the meeting's *leitmotif:* aspirations and affective futures. Personally, I would like to highlight the encounter with the already known work of Peter Adey and Kaya Berry, and the opportunity to learn about the research of Tina Harris and Weiqiang Lin. For me and my fellow researchers – who are just beginning academic careers – this was a great opportunity, and I hope we can all continue to cross paths in the future.

Finally, and in line with the idea of the aspirational, I believe that the most relevant aspect of this symposium is that it served as a starting point for future discussions on aeromobility and its challenges. Such discussions must take place with a global perspective and must emphasize that, despite being global, the phenomenon takes various territorial forms, both in its deepening as well as in the consequences and resistances it generates. The first concrete product is the upcoming publication of a special issue in the journal *Mobility Humanities*, which will be worked on during 2025 with an expected publication in early 2026. For me, this meeting also led to the presentation of a panel at the next meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science, to be held in September 2025 in Seattle. Entitled "The Third Aerospace Revolution and its Reverberations," our panel will be led by me and Naomi Veenhoven, whom I met at AIR-MAP, and its aim is to thematize from various disciplines the multiple challenges and consequences implied by the third aerospace revolution – that is, the role of digitization and the search for a more sustainable aerospace industry in the face of a massification of aeromobility.

Lastly, it is important to conclude by highlighting and thanking the institutions that made both the conference and the AIR-MAP symposium possible, in terms of their organization, the funding that facilitated the attendance of many of the participating researchers, and the care and dedication involved in convening and bringing to life an event of such magnitude. As mentioned above, these include Konkuk University, through its Academy of Mobilities Humanities; the International Institute for Asian Studies; Urban Knowledge Network Asia; the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes; the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences of the National University of Singapore; and the Institute of Developing Economies – Japan External Trade Organization. Without them, both the conference and the symposium would not have been possible.

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Fig. 1 (above): Group excursion to the surroundings of Incheon International Airport, led by Kaya Barry. (Photo courtesy of Benjamin Linder, 2024)

Fig. 2 (left): Alejandra Espinosa Andrade presents her work on Mariscal Sucre International Airport (Quito, Ecuador) at the AIR-MAP symposium. (Photo courtesy of Benjamin Linder, 2024)

Asia in the World

Reimagining Fellowship in a Multipolar World

Laura Erber

We are excited to announce a significant transformation of the IIAS Fellowship Programme. Responding to the evolving landscape of global knowledge production, we are reimagining our fellowship structure to better reflect the multipolar and interconnected nature of contemporary scholarship. Our new fellowship format, titled 'Asia in the World,' marks a deliberate shift toward a more globally integrated approach to Asian Studies. This change recognizes that understanding Asia today requires perspectives that go beyond traditional geographic, disciplinary, and epistemological boundaries. By redesigning our program, we aim to create a more polyphonic intellectual environment where diverse voices and methodologies can flourish in conversation with one another.

A fellowship program acts as a lens that zooms in on the politics of knowledge. Within Area Studies, it reveals something crucial: how we delineate and define regions for academic inquiry reflects deeper assumptions about how knowledge is organized and valued. These divisions – whether geographical, cultural, or epistemological – reflect not just academic traditions but complex regional histories of understanding, interpretation, and interrelation.

The history of residential fellowships also reveals something crucial about the space in which knowledge is shaped. When Rainer Maria Rilke arrived at Duino Castle in 1911, he discovered how a change of place could transform his thoughts into poetry. This tradition is continued by countless artists and scholars who have found in the temporary spaces of fellowship programs that rare alchemy between solitude and community that fuels creative and intellectual breakthroughs.

At a time when critical or creative thinking and the Humanities and Social Sciences are increasingly marginalized, the IIAS Fellowship Programme creates exactly this essential space where different perspectives meet and new questions emerge. This is not just about reimagining Asian studies – it is about participating in a crucial conversation about the place of humanistically driven research in our times, a conversation that asks not just what we know but how and for what purposes.

With a record of over 30 years and more than 1000 alumni, the IIAS Fellowship Programme stands as one of the oldest of its kind and a benchmark for scholars in Asian studies worldwide. In our shifting world order, with de-centered and multipolar forms of knowledge production, scholars need to transcend regional hierarchies and disciplinary boundaries.

The IIAS Fellowship Programme now takes a bold step forward with 'Asia in the World,' a pioneering initiative that embodies our Institute's commitment to network-building and collaborative scholarship. Our new program structure follows a three-phase journey: fellows start with six months at IIAS in Leiden, where they immerse themselves in our scientific and scholarly community. They then spend four to five months at a partner institution in Asia, Africa, Latin America, or Europe, experiencing different academic cultures and knowledge traditions. The journey culminates in Leiden, where these varied experiences converge and transform into new insights presented in a public event. This exercise will be thoughtfully and collectively curated by the fellows and the co-hosting institutional partners.

This novel fellowship structure emerges from our conviction that building knowledge is inextricably linked to life experience, shaped by encounters with different ways of thinking and working. This formula will create opportunities for scholars to engage with different academic contexts and knowledge traditions, enriching collaborative opportunities in today's interconnected academic landscape.

With the Asia in The World Fellowship Programme, scholars join a community dedicated to understanding Asia's complex entanglements with the world through diverse intellectual and critical traditions. We are confident that our diverse network of partner institutions will unlock new pathways for more inclusive and equitable forms of knowledge cultivation. This will lead to a richer, more interconnected global understanding of the world's societies, cultures, and histories intricately linked to local contexts.

Laura Erber is Global Partnerships and Fellowship Programme Coordinator at IIAS. Email: l.rabelo.erber@iias.nl

Cultivating Knowledge and Connections

Reflections from IIAS Fellows

During our fellowship at the International Institute for Asian Studies, we had the opportunity to engage in a range of activities aimed at enhancing our academic paths, fostering collaboration, and promoting personal growth. In this reflection, we revisit some of these memorable activities and experiences, including visits to three partner institutions of the IIAS Fellowship Programme.

Fig. 1 (above right): IIAS fellows visit Framer Framed in Amsterdam. (Photo courtesy of Laura Erber, 2024)

Alternative Encounters at Framer Framed, Amsterdam

Ming Luo and Zhengfeng Wang

Our visit to Framer Framed in October 2024 was an inspiring encounter with an alternative model of knowledge production and artistic engagement. Retaining its spirit of movement and transformation, this canal-side art gallery and platform for 'contemporary art, visual culture, and critical theory and practice' took us to the industrial wasteland of Amsterdam Oost.

The space, with its brick facade and metalwork roof structure, provides ample room for artists while embodying a sense of openness. We explored the exhibition on citizenship in Somaliland, the Somali region. Rather than being confined by rigid walls, the curation used fabric to guide visitor flow, creating a sense of framing and enclosure while maintaining fluidity. This dynamic approach resonates with Framer Framed's broader mission: to serve as a platform where knowledge, culture, and people continuously connect and evolve. Emily Shin-Jie Lee from Framer Framed walked us through past publications and shared insights into how the institute fosters artistic practices, critical thought, and community engagement. Experiencing the energy that fuels all the meaningful work at this remarkable institute made it clear that 'nomadicity' not just describes Framer Framed's history but also its approach to art, knowledge, and community.

Treasures at the International Institute for Social History (IISG), Amsterdam

My Hang Thi Bui and Xiaomei Zhao

In late November 2024, our fellow cohort visited the International Institute of Social History (IISG) in Amsterdam, where we were introduced to its treasure trove of collections through a tour given by the brilliant Eef Vermeij, Curator of Asian Collections at IISG.

Eef guided us through multiple layers of the historical building of IISG, home to global archives on labor and social movements. As an avant-garde archival institute, IISG offers a diverse range of materials, including written works, audio and video footage, and objects that bear witness to significant social movements around the world. We were particularly struck by the poster collection; for example, there was an original Vietnamese poster promoting a contest on the history of Thăng Long – Hà Nội, commemorating the city's 990th anniversary in 2000. Another highlight was the renowned (and somewhat controversial) Dutch political poster featuring a naked woman and a curious cow, created for the 1971 Dutch parliamentary elections. These archival materials, as well as thematic exhibitions curated and displayed at the institute, are all accessible to the general public. It was truly incredible to see such a rich collection of global history at this corner of Amsterdam's Cruquius Island.

Fig. 2-3 (left): IIAS fellows explore the International Institute of Social History (IISG) in Amsterdam. (Photos courtesy of IIAS, 2024)

The Käte Hamburger Center for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS), Heidelberg, Germany

Meera Venkatachalam and Sandra Sattler

From 4 December to 7 December 2024, IIAS fellows visited the Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS) at the University of Heidelberg.

Over two days, during a series of informal workshops and meetings, we met with the Director of the Centre, Prof. Dr. Robert Folger, and a number of the fellows. The Centre boasts diverse expertise in various disciplines, from Media Studies to Anthropology and History, and we met fellows from Germany, the United Kingdom, Colombia, Brazil, and Thailand. The Käte Hamburger fellows were very interested in the work of IIAS and eager to learn more about our unique approach to Asian Studies, which they then tried to apply to their programs. The Director also shared valuable insights on applying for and securing funding in the German higher education system.

The other highlight of our trip to Heidelberg was the lively Christmas market – we enjoyed the lights and energy and most of all, the glühwein!

Fig. 4 (right): IIAS fellows visit the Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS) at the University of Heidelberg. (Photo courtesy of IIAS, 2024)

Film Sessions in Leiden

Sarah Niazi and Ling Zhang

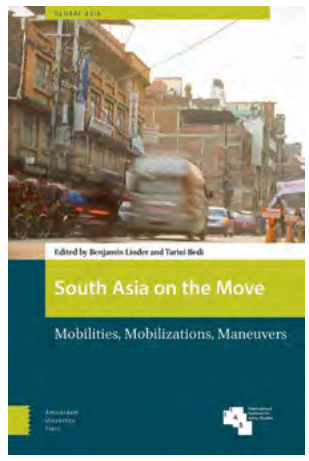
At IIAS, we embrace a vibrant culture of film screenings and discussions, spanning diverse themes, genres, and styles – from fiction to documentaries – featuring works from Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America.

Apart from our regular Friday film screenings, where fellows share a film that reflects their research interests and disciplinary backgrounds, since February 2025, we have been organizing a series of films on themes related to Higher Education. These films have sparked transregional and interdisciplinary dialogues on knowledge production amid academic precarity and shifting social landscapes. We have also hosted public screenings with filmmakers in attendance, such as Chinese documentarian Fan Jian's *After the Rain* (2021), fostering dynamic exchanges through Q&A sessions with engaged audiences. These film events embody our commitment to outreach and social engagement, extending the intellectual conversations beyond IIAS.

Fig. 5 (above): IIAS fellows gather for film screenings and group discussions. (Photo courtesy of Ling Zhang, 2024)

South Asia and the Mobilities Turn

Benjamin Linder



Over the past two decades, "mobilities" has become a key theoretical and empirical concept across the social sciences and humanities. Our new book, *South Asia on the Move: Mobilities, Mobilizations, Maneuvers*, highlights the value of applying a mobilities perspective to South Asia and, conversely, of de-centering extant mobilities literature through the proliferation of South Asian perspectives and case studies. Comprising ethnographic and historical chapters across multiple locations, the volume takes an expansive view on questions of movement and its role in social life.

Before sketching some of the journeys explored within the book, it is worth noting the long journey that finally brought *South Asia on the Move* to print since its initial inception nearly ten years ago. In 2014, I was a PhD student at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Tarini Bedi was a crucial member of my dissertation committee. As I prepared for my preliminary exams, Tarini agreed to supervise an independent study on the topic of mobilities, enabling us to read some of the key texts in the still-blossoming scholarship. Mobilities literature draws on diverse antecedents in transport geography, urban studies, human geography, science and technology studies, anthropology, and more. However, the emergence of a veritable "mobilities turn" in social theory – a "new mobilities paradigm," as it was sometimes called – began around 2006, when several articles sketched the contours of the emerging framework.[1] Coupled with the inaugural issue of the journal *Mobilities*, these sources set the tone for two decades of future research.

At its core, the mobilities paradigm highlights the ubiquity of movements at multiple scales, demonstrating the revelatory insights that can emerge when we challenge traditional philosophical assumptions of fixity and stability, or what the anthropologist Liisa Malkki dubbed a "sedentarist metaphysics."[2] By the time Tarini Bedi and I had begun reading together for my independent study, scholars from a wide array of disciplines had joined the mobilities trend, applying a mobilities perspective to everything from tourism to migrant labor, from placemaking to dance choreography. Notwithstanding its diverse applications, mobilities work was spearheaded by a group of geographers and sociologists working in the United Kingdom, Northern/Western Europe, and (to a lesser extent) the United States. Despite earnest calls by many of those same scholars for research on and from other regions, the early years of mobilities scholarship remained dominated by Western/Northern case studies and perspectives. The relative under-emphasis of the Global South called for intervention, and this volume represents one such intervention.

Back in 2014, we discussed these issues at length throughout our independent study. Mobilities literature suggested a new suite of theoretical and methodological tools for understanding social life, and Tarini and I found that toolkit extraordinarily useful in our respective research projects. For my own work, mobilities would offer a concrete approach to the dynamism and incessant transformation of my field site, the cosmopolitan neighborhood of Thamel in Kathmandu. With some key exceptions, most people experience Thamel as a space of transience, flux, and liminality. Mobilities helped me capture that atmosphere, both conceptually and ethnographically.

At the same time, as anthropologists, both Tarini and I felt it was crucial to expand the geographical and cultural horizons of mobilities research. Working in India and Nepal, respectively, we gravitated towards an exploration of South Asian mobilities in particular. At one level, research from different parts of the world enriches scholarship, and a more diverse literature thus offers a value in and of itself. On another level, however, the focus on South Asian mobilities encompasses far more than encouraging representation for its own sake. It provokes a radical decentering of scholarly assumptions, helping to mitigate against a host of cultural and intellectual biases. As I wrote in the introductory essay to the volume: "An excessive focus on Western/Northern mobilities not only yields explanations of questionable utility and applicability to the rest of the world. It also tends to position Western experiences, concepts, and formations as universal, despite being, in fact, particular and situated."[3] The genesis of this book can be traced to those conversations during our independent study. The year following our initial reading group, Tarini emailed me to inquire about producing a book on the topic of South Asian mobilities. We traded emails back and forth for some time before deciding to pursue an edited volume. Many of the contributors to the final book were on our minds from the very beginning, whereas several others came aboard only in subsequent years. We wanted to approach the theme with the broadest possible scope. "Mobilities" for us included everything from mediated photographs to porous borders, from disabled bodies to Instagram imaginaries, from immigrant entrepreneurs in the United States to Western tourists in Kathmandu. The book tries to showcase the breadth of mobilities research on the subcontinent, not just as a collection of individual research projects, but also as a general shift in perspective towards the many ways in which movements of all kinds continue to re-shape South Asia and its place on the global map.

The book took shape in fits and starts over the course of many years, and it was always a team effort. Tarini and I alternated at the helm, trading duties and meeting periodically to check in about progress. By 2020, after I had completed my PhD and Tarini had earned tenure at the University of Illinois at Chicago, the steady progression of the book accelerated once again. We organized the table of contents, solicited one final contribution, and began finalizing the text.

The resulting manuscript included eight body chapters on diverse themes and topics. Malini Sur's chapter examines the lives and temporalities of married women in ecologically shifting borderlands between India and Bangladesh (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, Rashmi Sadana draws on her work about the Delhi Metro to illuminate the role of a safehouse for intercaste couples fleeing ostracization and family violence for their forbidden romances. Following this, daniel dillon explores ethnic tensions in postwar Sri Lanka through a careful exploration of driving and differential policing in Jaffna (Chapter 4). In Chapter 5, Mark Liechty links temporality and infrastructure to historicize the emergence, development, and transformation of tourism in Nepal. Picking up the key postcolonial theme of Orientalist imaginaries, Rumya S. Putcha (Chapter 6) explores the nexus of media representations and Instagram influencers that fuel and reflect Western fantasies of South Asia as a region of spiritual salvation. Following this, Andrew Nelson brings us to the gas stations of North Texas in the United States (Chapter 7). Focusing especially on those owned and operated by Nepalis, who often purchased them from previous Indian owners, the chapter demonstrates the nuanced labor hierarchies that emerge between different South Asian diasporas in the United States. The final two chapters explore medical (im)mobilities through two very different case studies. In Chapter 8, Sarah Pinto digs into the colonial archives of psychiatry in India to theorize the role of and response to various modes of medical immobility, from temporary paralysis to trance-like states. Finally, Michele Friedner and James Staples write about the ways that disabled people move through contemporary India, especially highlighting how disability can sometimes enable the emergence of new modes of mobility, solidarity, and opportunity.

In the Afterword to the volume, co-editor Tarini Bedi sketches the pedagogical dimension to mobilities. In many ways, her essay returns to the genesis of the book itself – that is, how the classroom can and should foster engagement with mobilities. Notably, this does not only entail reviewing the scholarly literature, as she and I did together during our reading sessions in 2014. Rather, Tarini lays out a suite of pedagogical, experiential resources that she has utilized in her own courses from Chicago to Heidelberg. These include a list of multimedia teaching resources as well as several experiential exercises (e.g., algorithmic walks, mobility journals). After some much-appreciated final editorial assistance from Amna Pathan, who served as Tarini's research assistant at Heidelberg University in 2022, we submitted the completed manuscript to Amsterdam University Press, and the volume proceeded relatively swiftly to publication from there. In addition to all of the contributors to the volume, we would like to extend sincere gratitude to Mary Lynn van Dijk, the Publications Officer at IIAS, who shepherded the project since our initial proposal and offered key logistical and editorial assistance. Many others deserve our thanks as well, especially Inge Klompmakers (Commissioning Editor at AUP), Jasmijn Zondervan (Production Editor at AUP), Tak-Wing Ngo ("Global Asia" Series Editor), as well as the peer reviewers, copyeditors, and designers who worked to improve and sharpen the final book.

This book was the outcome of an extended conversation. That conversation began between Tarini and myself when I was a pre-fieldwork PhD student. It continued in subsequent years, as we both worked on our respective ethnographic research projects and, simultaneously, as we solicited contributions from other mobilities scholars in our networks. At the same time, *South Asia on the Move* does not represent the culmination of that conversation, but rather a dramatic extension of it. As I note in the volume's introduction, we hope that the book inspires further interest in South Asian mobilities and, indeed, in mobilities research beyond the Global North more generally.

This Open Access title can be downloaded using the link on:
https://www.aup.nl/nl/book/9789048557776/south-asia-on-the-move

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Notes

1 Sheller, Mimi, and John Urry. 2006. "The New Mobilities Paradigm." *Environment and Planning* A 38 (2): 207–26; Hannam, Kevin, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry. 2006. "Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings." *Mobilities* 1 (1): 1–22.

2 Malkki, Liisa H. 1997. "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity Among Scholars and Refugees." In *Culture Power Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, edited by Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, 52–74. Durham: Duke University Press.

3 Linder, Benjamin. 2025. "Introduction: South Asia on the Move." In *South Asia on the Move: Mobilities Mobilizations, Maneuvers*, Benjamin Linder and Tarini Bedi (eds.). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, p. 13.

Exploring a Design Archive

The Global Circulation of Cloth across Africa-Asia-Europe

Aarti Kawlra and Jody Benjamin

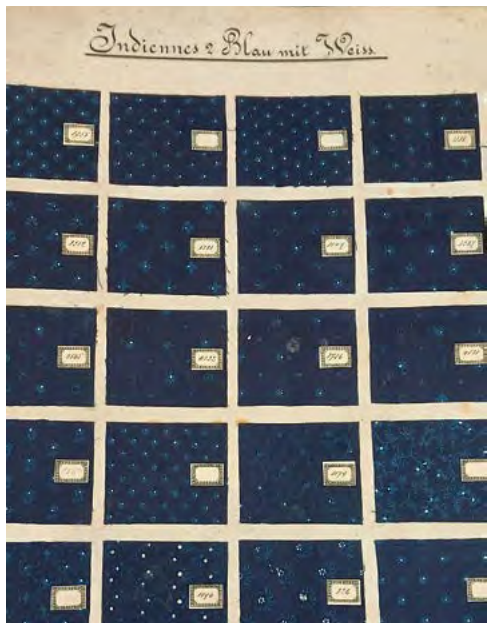

Fig. 1 (above): Replicas of Indian Chintz patterns referred to as Indiennes. These are predominantly in indigo blues and madder reds with tiny motifs such as spots and buds (buté), tendrils or creepers (bél), checks and stripes, and overall ordered web patterns (jaal), themselves drawing from an Indo-Persian heritage. (Photo courtesy of the authors, 2024)

Fig. 2 (left): Patterns replicating the Javanese sarong. (Photo courtesy of the authors, 2024)

Fig. 3 (below left): Sample patterns for the African market in broader cloths with motifs drawn from colonial modernity in vivid colors. (Photo courtesy of the authors, 2024)

Fig. 4 (below right): Among the roller print panels on display at Galerie Atiss was one produced at SOTIBA to commemorate the First World Festival of Black Arts (Festival Mondial des Arts Negres) held at Dakar in 1966. (Photo courtesy of the authors, 2024)

Popular understandings of textiles and dyes are invariably colored by colonial, national, and post-war UN approaches to the development and rehabilitation of crafts since the second half of the twentieth century. More recently, the neoliberal wave has prompted the institutionalization of culturally significant textiles within national discourses of heritage and/or creative economies. On the other hand, historiographies of cloth – interrogating cultural authenticity, provenance, and patrimony – inevitably run up against histories of capitalism, colonial commerce, and global markets, and must necessarily adopt trans-regional perspectives. In this essay, we outline the parameters of a proposed research collaboration that takes printed textile pattern books as a point of departure – namely, an archive dating back to the nineteenth century and belonging to an industrial printing company in Senegal – to illuminate connected histories of textile production in West Africa, Asia, and Europe.

An Africa-Asia-Europe axis of collaboration

This project builds on discussions on transnational histories of cloth exchanges between Africa and Asia, which took place during a weeklong *In Situ* Graduate School (ISGS) co-organized by IIAS and Leiden Global of Leiden University, in the historic textile town of Leiden in September 2022. The immersive master class brought together a group of conveners, graduate students, local practitioners, and curators of prominent museums holding vast collections of Asian and African textiles in Leiden and Tilburg, to share their knowledge and experience from transnational, global perspectives. A public roundtable concluded the ISGS with open questions regarding archival practice and museum representations of cloth within Eurocentric historiographies. Also discussed was the erasure of local knowledge and labor from dominant discourses that emerged from the legacies of colonial collecting within the disciplines of art history, anthropology, and museum studies. Co-conveners Neelam Raina, Pedro Pombo, and Jody Benjamin are currently co-editing a volume titled *Decolonising Cloth*, which includes contributions from participants of the ISGS among others, under IIAS' "Humanities Across Borders Methodologies" book series with Amsterdam University Press.

Our collaboration also builds on a recently published monograph that explores textile histories across a broad region of western Africa, from the Malian Sahel to riverine Senegal and coastal Guinea, during the eighteenth century. In *The Texture of Change: Dress, Self-Fashioning and History in Western Africa, 1700-1850* (Ohio University Press, 2024), Benjamin analyzes archival, visual, oral, and material sources drawn from three continents to illuminate entanglements between African textile industries and global commerce, the politics of Islamic reform, and an encroaching European colonial power.

The pattern books housed in Senegal represent a rich, unexplored archive of printed cotton textiles manufactured in Europe for West African markets. We adopt a South-South lens to explore questions like: how did European producers learn about West African consumer tastes and preferences for printed cloths? Which Asian designs and patterns became popular in particular West African markets, and which were less taken up? Which local motifs or cultural symbols were adapted into wax print cloth for African markets? What was the impact of the then-novel use of chemical dyes on consumer tastes and on the local environment? What was the impact of importing these mass-produced colorful wax prints on local weavers and dyers, and how did they respond? How comparable are the dynamics of artisanal textile production in West Africa to those unfolding in parts of Asia at the same time?

Our goal is not only to produce a co-authored research paper, but also to develop a collaborative master's level program for the production and dissemination of textiles histories in the Global South, which can be adapted in a variety of local contexts.

Artefacts of craft knowhow: printed textile pattern books

Our inquiry began with Pattern Books displayed at the Galerie Atiss on the occasion of the 15th edition of the Dakar Biennale of Contemporary African Art, also known as Dak'Art (November 7 – December 7, 2024). The 30 or so textile pattern books from the turn of the twentieth century are thick, dusty volumes with hundreds of printed cotton cloth samples. Containing a huge repertoire of 'Wax Print' designs, these volumes are part of a larger collection of technical knowhow of one of the first industrial textile printing and dyeing units in Senegal, SOTIBA Simpafrique (Société de Teinture Impression et Blanchiment Africaine), established in 1951. As SOTIBA came into existence many decades after the pattern books were created, it is not yet clear how the books became part of the company's archive.

The story of the colonial commerce in printed textiles begins with the invention in the 1830's of *La Javanaise*, a textile printing machine that could mechanically reproduce designs that were otherwise produced by hand. Dutch manufacturers and traders were quick to establish a monopoly in the production and trade of imitation, machine-made, printed textiles for the Indian and Javanese (Dutch East Indies) markets. When the reception and taste for these fake batiks, identifiable as being printed only on one side of the cloth, declined in the late nineteenth century, there was a scramble between British, Dutch, and Swiss manufacturers to find new markets in Africa. There are many different accounts by historians on how and when the designs originally intended for Indian and Indonesian markets were adapted for African consumers. One story attributes the circuit of ideas and visual references between missionaries of the Basel Mission in West Africa and the subsequent role of the Basel Trading Company (BTC) in expanding its distribution channels via the missionary network.

The sample books we encountered in Dakar are artefacts of craft knowhow and testimony of the industrial espionage between competing European textile dye and printing companies at the turn of the twentieth century. There are three discernible design registers, indicating different consumer preferences: those for the Indian subcontinent, for the Javanese archipelago, and for West African markets. In the first category of prints are copies of Chintz patterns, or *Indiennes* [Fig. 1]. The second register includes patterns intended as unstitched garments like the sarong, with an identifiable border, body, and end-piece, using a magnificent range of flora, fauna, and hybrid mythical creature motifs taken from diverse cultural traditions including China. The vocabulary of motifs, colors, and layout for these two categories refers to the existing assemblage available to British and Dutch traders from professional artisan communities in their respective colonies [Fig. 2].

It is interesting to see how the repository of designs for the African market, the third register, are bolder and bigger in size, echoing references from colonial modernity such as the alphabet, the book/Bible, blackboard, the clock, ships, lighthouses, buildings, coffee beans, playing cards, and more. The color palette for the African wax prints is also more vivid, as they utilize the newly introduced chemical dyes which are in brighter hues and tones than the more subdued natural dyes derived from plants and insects, intended for Asian consumers [Fig. 3].

In the industrial printing technique, cylindrical roller pins, also in the SOTIBA archive and displayed at the Dakar Biennale, mechanized the hand-applied wax or the resist painting process, prior to dyeing the cloth. These roller pins were probably hand-engraved with motifs in reverse so that they would leave a positive impression on the cloth with the application of color. The motifs are predominantly drawn from banal or generic representations of 'Africa' and were referred to as the 'Veritable Fancy Print' or 'Lagos' [Fig. 4]. Among the rollers on display there is one that bears the image of President Senghor, who argued for a new politics of cultural representation that affirmed local and regional economic self-sufficiency. A textile panel showing this image is now in the collection of the British Museum.

The 'Wax Prints' or 'Javas' are different from the 'Fancy'; they bear an aesthetic value for an elite segment of consumers of African batik who seek a global fashion brand like Vlisco. Based in the Netherlands, Vlisco continues to hold a virtual monopoly for markets in West Africa on account of their indomitable design repertoire and technical mastery, dating back to colonial times. Yet, there is also a growing trend among social entrepreneurs and designers, in and from Africa, to valorize the handmade, fueled by a neoliberal nostalgia for a bygone era, also visible in Asia. It involves a search for design solutions in collaboration with local artisans to produce and popularize *swadeshi* or "one's own" versions of wax printed textiles. It is part of an effort to reclaim cultural autonomy and national self-fashioning through textile motifs, prints, and patterns that, despite colonial roots, can connect an inalienable past to more sustainable and just futures.

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Global Challenges, Local Struggles

Activist Responses to Waterway Crises

Paul Rabé and Satya Maia Patchineelam

In an age of pervasive and structural damage to local ecosystems from human interventions, how can local communities, activists, scientists, and academics respond? Rivers, canals, and creeks play host to many overlapping environmental crises, climate change phenomena, and development conflicts. These crises and conflicts directly affect local communities and ecosystems in manifold ways, and yet their origins are often global and even planetary in nature.

The River Cities Network (RCN) is a global network of scholars, professionals, and activists founded at IIAS in 2022 with a commitment to regenerating rivers and waterways for the benefit of humans and nonhumans alike. In this edition of *The Newsletter*, we as RCN coordinators speak to local advocates and activists to understand how they try to resolve the tension between global challenges affecting their waterways and the possibility of local responses. We highlight three cases, on different continents, each of which revolves around a distinct ecological crisis. In the Amazonian region of Brazil, along the Xingu River, local riverine communities have set up a council to fight for their rights, and the rights of the river, after being displaced from their ancestral homes following the construction of a huge dam. Along the Brantas and Surabaya Rivers in East Java, Indonesia, a local NGO, ECOTON, deploys various forms of activism to hold the government to account and to promote citizen science to try and address the heavy pollution in these rivers. And in Alexandria, Egypt, a team of local scholars has embraced the Mahmoudiya Canal, which has been mostly covered and paved over to make way for a major highway. This team is raising awareness about the devastating long-term environmental, urban, and cultural consequences of losing this historic canal, and in so doing, attempting to prevent other water bodies in the Nile delta from suffering the same fate.

All three cases convey a deep sense of loss from ill-advised anthropogenic actions. This loss is material as well as spiritual. The damming, pollution, and paving over of rivers radically alters local ecosystems and reduces biodiversity. Human communities lose their connection to the waterways and the natural resources that riverine ecosystems provide them. They also lose their way of life and their knowledge systems, which for many communities are deeply tied to the water and its surrounding environment.

This experience points to a fundamental premise of the RCN, which is that rivers and other waterways are mirrors of their societies. Damage to local ecosystems and damage to local communities are deeply connected. Therefore, RCN holds that there can be no sustainable environmental protection and strengthening of biodiversity in the absence of healthy and secure communities. Environmental and social justice, however defined, are interconnected.

Despite the dramatic sense of loss, there is also hope. The three stories on this spread show us that concerned citizens, residents, and local activists are pushing back and trying to shape policies affecting the lives of their rivers and communities. Will it be enough? Time will tell, but in any case, networks such as RCN exist to help local teams learn from and support each other.

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Advocacy by a Riverine Council (Parà, Brazil)

This piece is narrated by Joana Gomes (member of the riverine council representing the Palhal region) and co-authored by Leticia Tzerciak, Geysiane Costa e Silva, and Satya Maia Patchineelam (principal investigators of the Xingu River team of RCN).

The Xingu River in the state of Parà, in the Brazilian Amazon region, is home to many riverine communities, offering us a livelihood based on collective support and a subsistence system, where sharing and exchanging home-grown vegetables, fish, and small animals is common. Our communities descend from both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples who live along the riverbanks, away from urban centers. While we hold traditions and beliefs similar to indigenous groups, our land rights differ.

The riverine community in the Amazonian city of Altamira has historically maintained a dual connection to urban life. Many families once had two homes: one on the riverbanks and another along the streams in the city, to facilitate access to public services such as schools and healthcare. However, the construction of the Belo Monte Hydropower Dam forcibly displaced numerous riverine families from their ancestral lands. Many of us were resettled on the outskirts of Altamira, disrupting our livelihoods and severing our deep connection to the river. This displacement diminished our sense of belonging and fueled civic resistance against decisions imposed by dam authorities and the government.

Following displacement, riverine people organized alongside government agencies and NGOs to establish a council to push for our voices to be heard and our rights protected. This council successfully advocated for our right to return to the reservoir banks. It was believed that returning to the river would enable the riverine community to apply our traditional knowledge more effectively. Before the dam, the surrounding forest teemed with terrestrial animals, and the river was alive with fish. Riverine families used their ancestral knowledge to cultivate crops and medicinal plants. However, with the dam, the environment has changed drastically. Government-imposed restrictions limit riverine communities' traditional practices, fish populations have declined, and the water is now undrinkable. Fishing, once our primary source of income and protein, is no longer viable. Many families struggle financially and cannot afford the high costs of food and clean water.

Despite these challenges, riverine families continue to apply their traditional knowledge within the constraints of the Riverine Territory. Of the over 300 displaced families, fewer than half have received land to which to return. The company responsible for the dam and resettlement has not prioritized our well-being and our traditional livelihoods, which is an intangible heritage protected by the Brazilian constitution. The riverine council representatives suspect that the company creates internal conflicts to discourage families from asserting their rights. External projects presented to the council often lack effectiveness, failing to create meaningful change.

The riverine council believes that RCN can play a crucial role in supporting riverine communities by helping to amplify our voices, advocating for our rights, and facilitating sustainable solutions. By fostering stakeholder engagement, RCN can help connect riverine councils with NGOs, government agencies, and academic institutions to strengthen advocacy efforts. Additionally, RCN can support capacity-building initiatives by offering training on socio-environmental rights, land management, and sustainable economic alternatives such as agroforestry.

Addressing structural challenges requires community engagement, political advocacy, research, and sustainable economic initiatives. Strengthening community leadership and social participation is essential. Training riverine communities on socio-environmental rights, territorial management, and public policy access empowers them to participate in decision-making.

Advocacy and political engagement are crucial for change. Networks between communities, NGOs, and academic institutions generate collective pressure for fairer, more sustainable policies – such as the riverine council's success in securing a mitigation program for returning to the riverside. The council and its partners have mapped socio-environmental impacts, essential for understanding changes in river ecosystems. Data on environmental shifts and their effects on livelihoods inform better decision-making and policy development, reinforcing the community's connection to the river and its role in maintaining a healthy forest.

The riverine council is promoting new sustainable economic initiatives to enhance resilience, including agroforestry and adapted fisheries. Integrating traditional knowledge with scientific research ensures solutions align with riverine communities' needs and expertise. By fostering collaboration, advocating for policy changes, and supporting sustainable economic alternatives, civil society and networks like RCN can help protect riverine communities and our way of life.

Fig. 1 (far left): Effects of the Belo Monte Dam on the Xingu River. (Photo by S. Patchineelam, 2018)

Fig. 2 (left): Meeting of the Riverine Council. (Photo by S. Patchineelam, 2020)

Activism and Citizen Science in East Java (Indonesia)

This piece is narrated by Prigi Arisandi (Founder and Director for Science, Art and Communication at ECOTON)

The Brantas River in East Java, upstream of the city of Surabaya, is in a severely polluted state, as indicated by the high rate of extinction of freshwater fish. In 1991, 61 freshwater fish species were identified, but now only around 41 species remain. This extinction is caused by uncontrolled pollution from industrial waste and the massive conversion of riverbank conservation areas into residential zones. A similar fate befalls the Surabaya River, a tributary of the Brantas River, where since the 1990s the recycled paper industry has been dumping untreated waste and poisoning the raw water source for Surabaya's drinking water supply. Approximately 98% of the raw water for Surabaya's municipal water company (PDAM) comes from the Surabaya River. The waste dumping is an example of a clear injustice perpetuated by the industries and protected by the government. The government, which should be responsible for preserving the environment and ensuring river water quality, has instead tended to allow destructive practices to continue unchecked. Pollution of the Brantas River has resulted in 25% of fish in the downstream area experiencing intersex conditions due to pollution by Endocrine Disruption Chemicals (EDCs). Indicators of pollution are also evident from mass fish deaths in the Brantas River during the dry season (May to October). During this period, pollution in the Brantas River typically increases due to reduced water discharge combined with the influx of liquid waste from sugar factories, which operate in May.

The main challenge along both the Brantas and Surabaya Rivers lies in the lack of firm authority to enforce legal action against polluters. Weak law enforcement enables industries to discharge untreated waste into the river. Moreover, the rivers are not considered a government priority, and public involvement in managing and controlling pollution remains minimal.

ECOTON (https://ecoton.or.id) was founded in 1996 as a wetland conservation studies group at the Airlangga University Biology Program. We were incorporated as an NGO in 2000 and in 2017 we also became a legally registered Foundation. Our mission is to preserve the sustainability of rivers across Indonesia. ECOTON engages in environmental advocacy through a combination of litigation (filing lawsuits in court against the Government), river ecosystem conservation measures, and community-based efforts, including strengthening community and youth capacity by forming grassroots organizations among affected communities using citizen science approaches.

In an example of our litigation efforts, ECOTON recently won a lawsuit in the Supreme Court, which was filed to protest the negligence of the Minister of Public Works, the Minister of Environment, and the Governor of East Java in their failure to control pollution, which has led to frequent mass fish deaths in the Brantas River.

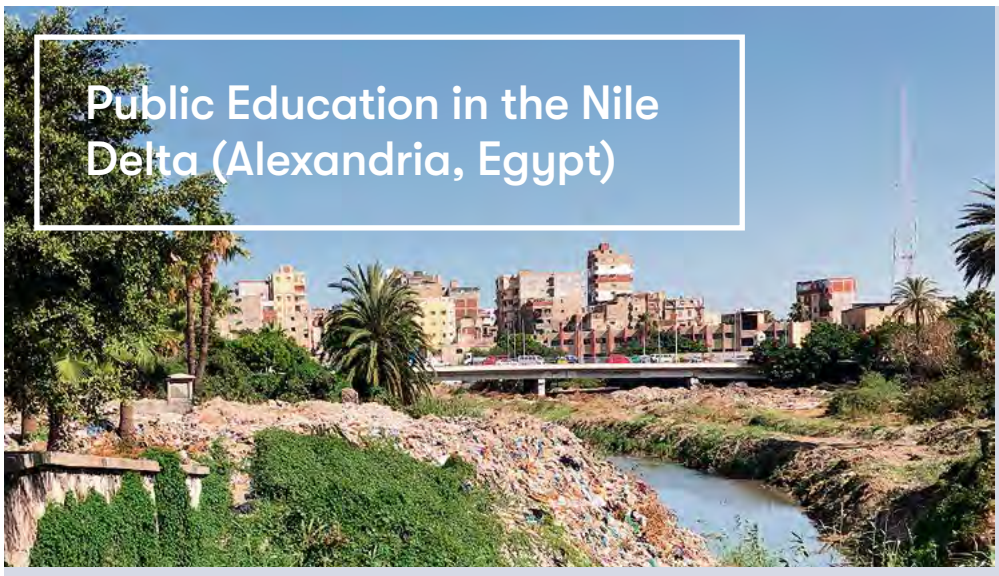
An example of our river ecosystem conservation measures are the fish sanctuaries, which were legally established through a regulation by the Governor of East Java in 2013. This effort has helped to increase freshwater fish biodiversity in the Brantas River, a source of drinking water for five million people in East Java.

Our community-based activities use citizen science as a tool to involve communities in protecting and monitoring rivers and the environment. We focus on empowering women, children, and youth, as these groups are the most vulnerable to environmental pollution. We also help to establish communities (formal or informal) to serve as spaces or platforms for capacity building and collective action. One of the initiatives for empowerment is the *Aksi Brantas* ("Brantas Action") program. The first step is to build trust and confidence among women and youth through citizen science, where we conduct collaborative research to uncover facts about ongoing environmental damage. We conduct participatory monitoring of river water quality using macroinvertebrates as bioindicators. The use of these bioindicators is easy, inexpensive, scalable, and serves as a tool for river pollution mitigation. In 2015, 1000 students along 300 km of the Brantas River were involved in conducting joint biomonitoring. The second step is to encourage communities to speak up and advocate for their rights to a healthy environment. Another initiative is the internship program for "scientist activists," where we involve university students to conduct participatory research with communities along the Brantas River. Students are guided to publish their research findings in journals and in online media as part of shaping public opinion and building awareness.

Finally, we also believe in the importance of campaigns to raise public awareness and mobilize citizens. In 2022-2023 ECOTON conducted the Indonesian River Expedition, which involved traveling by motorcycle for 12 months and forming over 25 river communities across the country. This initiative is currently advocating for the establishment of microplastic quality standards for rivers and industrial paper recycling wastewater. Its main approach is to publicize the threat of microplastics to ecosystems and human health through art, such as documentaries and art installations. The *Indonesian River Expedition* activity is one of the ways ECOTON disseminates its achievements and increases stakeholder participation in maintaining the Brantas River.

Other campaigns use art-science as a tool to raise public awareness about environmental issues. This includes the "plastic bottle tunnel," which is an installation of 12 meters long and two meters high consisting of over 4444 plastic bottles collected from the Brantas River. This installation highlights the low waste management services (serving less than 50% of the population) that lead people to dispose of trash in rivers.

Fig. 3 (below): "Stop Eating Plastic!" Activism by ECOTON. (Photo courtesy of ECOTON, 2025)



Public Education in the Nile Delta (Alexandria, Egypt)

This piece is narrated by Mohamed Gohar and Nancy Abd El-Moneim (principal investigators of the Mahmoudiya Canal team of RCN)

The river Nile is Egypt's source of life and civilization. It flows from its origin in Lake Victoria before it creates the Nile Delta in Northern Egypt. Historically, the river ended in several branches, delivering the water to the Mediterranean Sea. The Canopic branch was a trunk channel providing Alexandria with drinking water. It remained active during the city's ancient history, passing through the Greek, Roman, and probably early Arab times. The Canopic branch gradually lost its connection to the Nile due to climate change and insufficient maintenance, eventually silting up by the end of the first millennium CE, which led to the decline of the once-dominant port on the Mediterranean. By the 1820s, the viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, commissioned a French engineer to dig a wide, manmade channel/canal extending from the existing Rosetta branch of the Nile Delta. The purpose of this almost 74-kilometer canal was to supply Alexandria with fresh water and to restore it as Egypt's main Mediterranean port by linking it to the Nile and the trade routes from Upper Egypt. The canal that was named Mahmoudiya after the Ottoman sultan at that time, who was credited with culturally, industrially, and economically reviving Alexandria. The waterway also contributed to the deposition of sediments near the port coastline, helping overcome coastal erosion in the port area.

In addition, the canal helped to extend the agricultural lands and introduce new kinds of trees that created a new biological system on the banks of the waterways. By the 1950s, the canal started to lose significance due to the region's political and economic instability. In the last five decades, the canal has undergone multiple and severe ecological degradations. Over time, the in-city part of the canal became dilapidated and polluted, turning into a site for local waste disposal.

In 2018, the canal underwent a three-year landfilling project led by the state's governmental bodies. The project was referred to as the "Mahmoudiya Axis" and has resulted in transforming 21 kilometers of the canal inside Alexandria into a highway. This highway has six to eight lanes in each direction and ends about four kilometers before the seaport, leaving an isolated stretch of water in an industrial heritage complex. The landfilling of the canal has directly disconnected Alexandria from the river Nile, stopping sediment replenishment to the coastal port area.

The historic Mahmoudiya Canal in Alexandria has been transformed into a highway corridor, leading to significant environmental, social, and economic impacts. The canal has lost water biodiversity, trees, and biological habitats, and has caused coastal erosion and heat islands. The disconnection between the canal's two banks has also resulted in a sociocultural transformation, affecting both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The transformation has also led to increased air pollution, reduced green spaces, and disruptions in sediment transport, exacerbating coastal erosion. The transformation has also led to physical and social fragmentation, diminishing public engagement opportunities, and fewer recreational spaces.

Throughout the construction process, several academic members, historians, and activists in Alexandria began discussing the increasing impact of the transformation in the form of social media engagement and some academic papers. Recognizing the urgency of addressing these challenges, our RCN team was formed in 2022 and is dedicated to conducting a comprehensive study that examines the broader societal ramifications of this transformation. Through interdisciplinary research and stakeholder engagement, we aim to analyze the Mahmoudiya Canal's impact on urban resilience, economic viability, and the perception of cultural heritage in Alexandria. The canal covering was a top-down decision that has significantly impacted both the natural and built environment. The team's main concern is to build a relevant and updated understanding of the current situation through intensive field surveys/analyses that involve residents and users. In our case, activism cannot restore the canal: the situation is irreversible. However, our work acts as an informal educational tool in spreading knowledge about the long-term environmental, urban, and cultural consequences of losing the water body and cutting the connection with the river. In addition, this work would enhance the sustainable regeneration strategies that balance urban development with ecological restoration, ensuring that future interventions support a more inclusive and livable city.

Throughout the past two years, the community-centered approach enabled us to widen our understanding of the needs of selected qualitative groups and users of the case study. By identifying and communicating with local figures we were able to build a bridge between academic research and the local community. That has enriched our first-hand on ground knowledge; additionally, it fostered a rising sense of ownership among some individuals.

The RCN has been playing a pivotal role in facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience between the network's members. Being exposed to diverse case studies with different approaches is an essential learning tool for our team. We are looking for more cooperation with multidisciplinary teams working on other case studies to enhance our resilience capacity in dealing with the complexity of our case studies. Additionally, organizing a future workshop in Alexandria and working on the Mahmoudiya Canal with international experts would bring new approaches and ideas that would expand our knowledge.

Fig. 4 (above): Garbage dump on the Mahmoudiya Canal. (Photo by M. Gohar, 2023)

IIAS Research, Networks, and Initiatives

IIAS promotes critical, humanistic, and collaborative work on, with, in, and beyond Asia. Our platforms and programmes revolve around five interrelated core priorities: Research, Education & Pedagogy, Civic Engagement, Network Building, and Communication & Dissemination.

Our research and other initiatives are carried out within three thematic, partially overlapping research clusters in phase with contemporary Asian currents and built around the notion of social agency. While remaining open to exploring other potentially important topics, our current research clusters are 'Cities', 'Global Asia' and the 'Politics of Culture'.

More information

www.iias.asia/clusters

www.iias.asia/iias-core-priorities

www.iias.asia/about

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
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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

This joint programme forms part of a broader ambition to decentralise the production of knowledge about Asia by establishing a platform for continuing dialogues between universities in different parts in the world. The institutions involved in the present Dual Degree programme –IIAS, Leiden University, National Taiwan University and Yonsei University, and, most recently Gahjah Mada University – have established a fruitful collaboration in research and teaching and talks are underway with several universities in Asia and North Africa. 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
Taipei, Taiwan, 13-15 January 2026

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' 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.

Next Conference:
Africa-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge - Third Edition
an International Conference-Festival (CONFEST)
Dakar, Senegal, 11-14 June 2025

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

International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS)

The International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) is the largest global forum for academics and civil society exchange on Asia. It serves as a platform for scholars, social and cultural leaders and institutions focusing on issues critical to Asia, and, by implication, the rest of the world. The ICAS biennial conferences are organised by IIAS in cooperation with local universities, cities and institutions and are attended by scholars and other experts, institutions and publishers from around 60 countries. The biennial 'ICAS Book Prize' (IBP) awards prizes in the field of Asian Studies for books in Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish, and for PhD Theses in English. Thirteen conventions have been held since 1997 (Leiden, Berlin, Singapore, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Daejeon, Honolulu, Macao, Adelaide, Chiang Mai, Leiden (again), Kyoto (online), and Surabaya.

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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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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
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Cluster: Global Asia

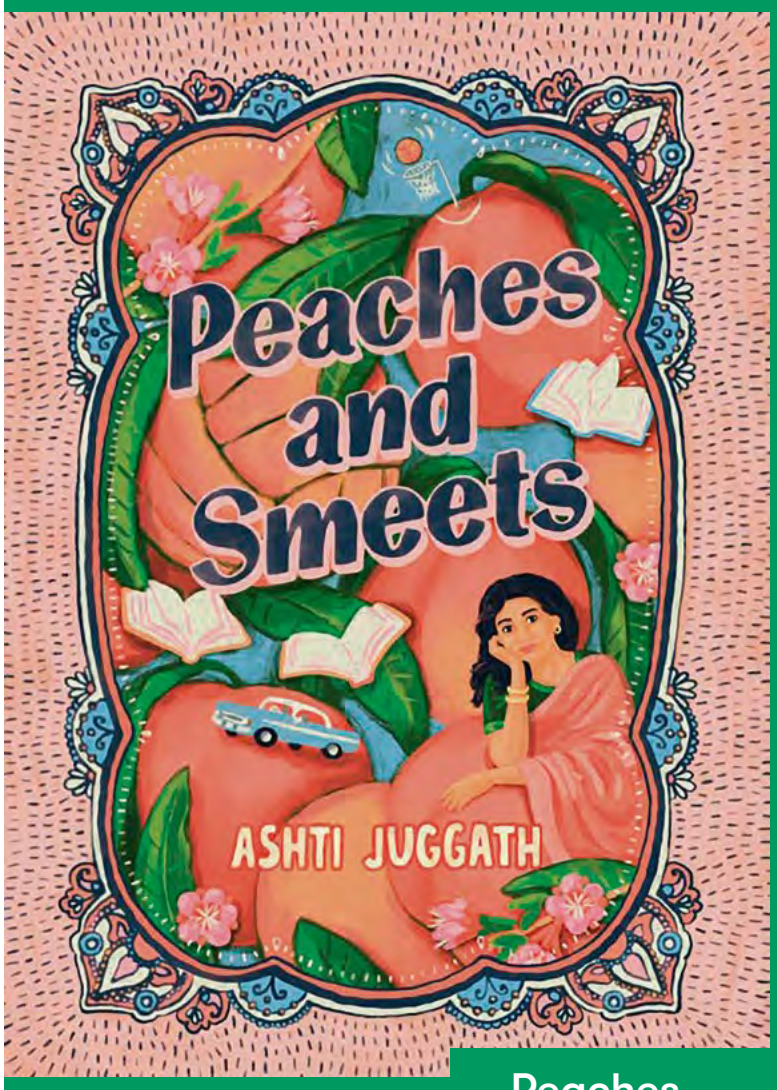
The Imprint

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

African Books Collective

African Books Collective

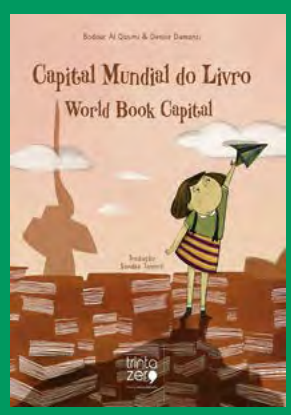
African Books Collective (ABC) is a UK-registered, non-profit organization that serves as a global marketing and distribution platform for books from Africa, including scholarly works, literature, and children's books. Representing over 150 African publishers, ABC offers a diverse range of academic, literary, and cultural content. We invite new publishers in these fields to join us and help share Africa's rich stories and knowledge with the world.



Peaches and Smeets

Ashti Juggath
Modjaji Books, South Africa

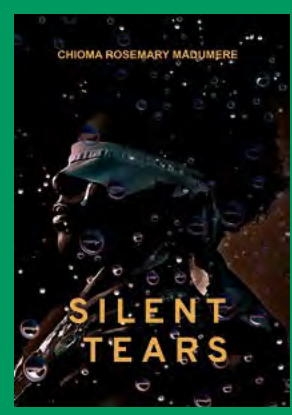
https://www.africanbookscollective.com/books/peaches-and-smeets



Capital Mundial do Livro

Bodour Al Qasimi and Denise Damanti
Editora Trinta Zero Nove, Mozambique

https://www.africanbookscollective.com/books/capital-mundial-do-livro



Silent Tears

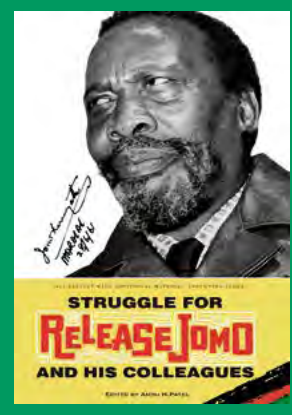
Chioma Rosemary Onyekaba
Palmwine Publishing, Nigeria

https://www.africanbookscollective.com/books/silent-tears

The Elves And Other Stories

Mike Sounou Mensa, Emmanuel Appiagyei, and Stanislaus Degboe
Education Logistics (Gh) Ltd, Ghana

https://www.africanbookscollective.com/books/the-elves-and-other-stories



Struggle for Release: Jomo & Colleagues

Ambu H. Patel (ed.)
Vita Books, Kenya

https://www.africanbookscollective.com/books/struggle-for-release-jomo-colleagues-1

Decolonizing African History

Toyin Falola. The Basler Afrika Bibliographien, Namibia

https://www.africanbookscollective.com/books/decolonizing-african-history

Revolution Recollected and New Struggle Poems

Tendai Rinos Mwanaka
Mwanaka Media and Publishing, Zimbabwe

https://www.africanbookscollective.com/books/revolution-recollected-and-new-struggle-poems

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