

# The Newsletter



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**Winners,  
shortlists and  
accolades**



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move, through  
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## In this edition of the Focus

# Textiles on the move, through time and space

Willem Vogelsang

Textiles and dress play a central role in social, economic, and spiritual interactions. They provide information on the power relations that define stratifications of class, wealth, and gender. Textiles are also repositories of techniques, for spinning, weaving, dyeing, printing, and embroidering, and they travel easily over time and space from one group of people to another, adopting new features and meanings.

This issue's Focus articles reflect upon the changing roles of textiles in society. Some of the articles were discussed during an online conference in October 2020, organized by IIAS with the assistance of Sandra Sardjono of the Tracing Patterns Foundation in Los Angeles, Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood of the Textile Research Centre (TRC) in Leiden, and Chris Buckley, Oxford. The articles explore ever-present processes of adoption and adaption of 'foreign' elements into a local cultural context.



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.

### In this issue

In July, IIAS welcomed Paramita Paul as the new Chief Editor of The Newsletter. We introduce her and Assistant Editor Benjamin Linder on page 49, bidding farewell to Sonja Zweegers, who left IIAS in June after serving as the Managing Editor of The Newsletter for more than a decade. The second phase of the Humanities Across Borders (HAB) programme has now begun with the consortium partners to sign a curriculum development agreement. On pp. 50-51, you can read about HAB's curriculum development and its vision, along with Tharaphi Than's article 'Ruptured space allows Myanmar youths to reimagine a new education system'. HAB's vision aligns well with the proposed education model of the Virtual Federal University (VFU), established in May 2021 in response to the 1 February Coup and led by members of the Yangon University Students' Union (UYSU). They envision an alternative education site free from institutional bureaucracies, disciplinary hierarchies, and a gate-keeping mentality. Furthermore, we are excited to announce our new 'IIAS Book Talk Series', dedicated to new titles published in the three IIAS publication series, 'Asian Heritages', 'Asian Cities' and 'Global Asia'. You will find the first four scheduled book talks, along with the new titles, on pp. 48-49, as well as other announcements. IIAS research programmes and other initiatives are described in brief on pp. 52-53; and on pp. 46-47, you will find information about the IIAS Fellowship programme and three 'fellows in the spotlight'.

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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Philippe Peycam

Change is the nature of things, and the last months have been rich in new developments for IIAS. The main one was the decision to resort to an online ICAS event, set to commence alongside the publication of this edition of The Newsletter. The online format is something we initially thought could be avoided until it became clear that the world was still in the grips of the pandemic. Since the decision was made, our colleagues of the ICAS Secretariat (Martina Van den Haak, Wai Cheung, Narutai Riengkruar, Paul Van der Velde) have worked tirelessly with their counterparts at Kyoto Seika University to ensure that the event would remain the vibrant and inclusive experience that has always characterized ICAS conventions. All that is technically and logistically possible has been done to ensure maximum accessibility and unconstrained interactions. I know how much our colleagues have been working, and are still doing so, so I want to take this opportunity to thank them on behalf of the whole IIAS team. The event, which will take place from August 24-28, will display a vast array of activities, bringing together nearly 2,000 contributors for a period of five days.

Another internal development within IIAS has been the recruitment of a new editorial team for the IIAS Newsletter as part of an overhaul of the institute's dissemination and communication strategy. For now, we are pleased to welcome Dr. Paramita Paul and Dr. Benjamin Linder as Newsletter Editor and

Assistant Editor, respectively. Their task began almost immediately after Sonja Zweegers formally handed the responsibility over to them. With Paramita and Ben, we plan to make use of the Newsletter's central visibility position to embed its production within a fluid series of online-based dissemination and communication instruments, from podcasts to the production of small films, while maintaining a strong textual component. The innovations developed by the ICAS team will certainly impact the way IIAS's own communication and dissemination will be organized. For now, however, we want to ensure a minimum of disruption in all of the IIAS communication operations.

In this period of transformations, many of which were accelerated – if not triggered – by the pandemic, I want to stress IIAS's unflinching determination to continue its work as promoter and facilitator of knowledge exchanges on, with and in Asia. We remain convinced that no academic endeavor which is not articulated in lived, experienced exchanges can really be considered as such. Whilst continuing to expand our capacities to offer new spaces for creative engagement, we still want to guarantee a high level of interactions, and that no one finds him/her-self left behind in a new digital divide, or as a result of the restrictions that are being enforced in our respective environments.

This point was reiterated in the way we have set the new implementation of the Humanities Across Borders (HAB) initiative to construct a humanist model of curricula development

across a network of partners from different regions of the world. With the sets of new objectives made in Chiang Mai in February 2020, and the enlarged consortium that has followed, with the renewed support of the Mellon Foundation, despite the new pandemic constraints – or perhaps thanks to them – we set out to empower four partners in four continents to anchor the four syllabi tracks based on themes of universal meaning (food, craft-making, words-in-use, space/place).

These are the University of Ghana, Kenyon Community College (Words), Ambedkar University (Space), and Leiden University College (Food). These 'anchor' partners will be responsible for shaping a curricular framework with the other members of the Consortium. Already, coordinators have been appointed by each institution. This model should enable HAB's pedagogy to move towards its acceptance as an accredited educational programme.

This new modus operandi should also enable IIAS to focus on another aspect of HAB, that of promoting special environments at the interstices of university-society, through which alternative models of intellectual engagement can develop. As I already referred to in this column, what we believe are often missing in academia are open spaces of academe-society interactions and transformations – like IIAS – able to civically ground scholarship and to better situate its endeavor in the global context.

Philippe Peycam, Director IIAS

# Ambon 1623/Banda 1621

Dutch and British colonial history revisited

Michiel Baas<sup>1</sup>

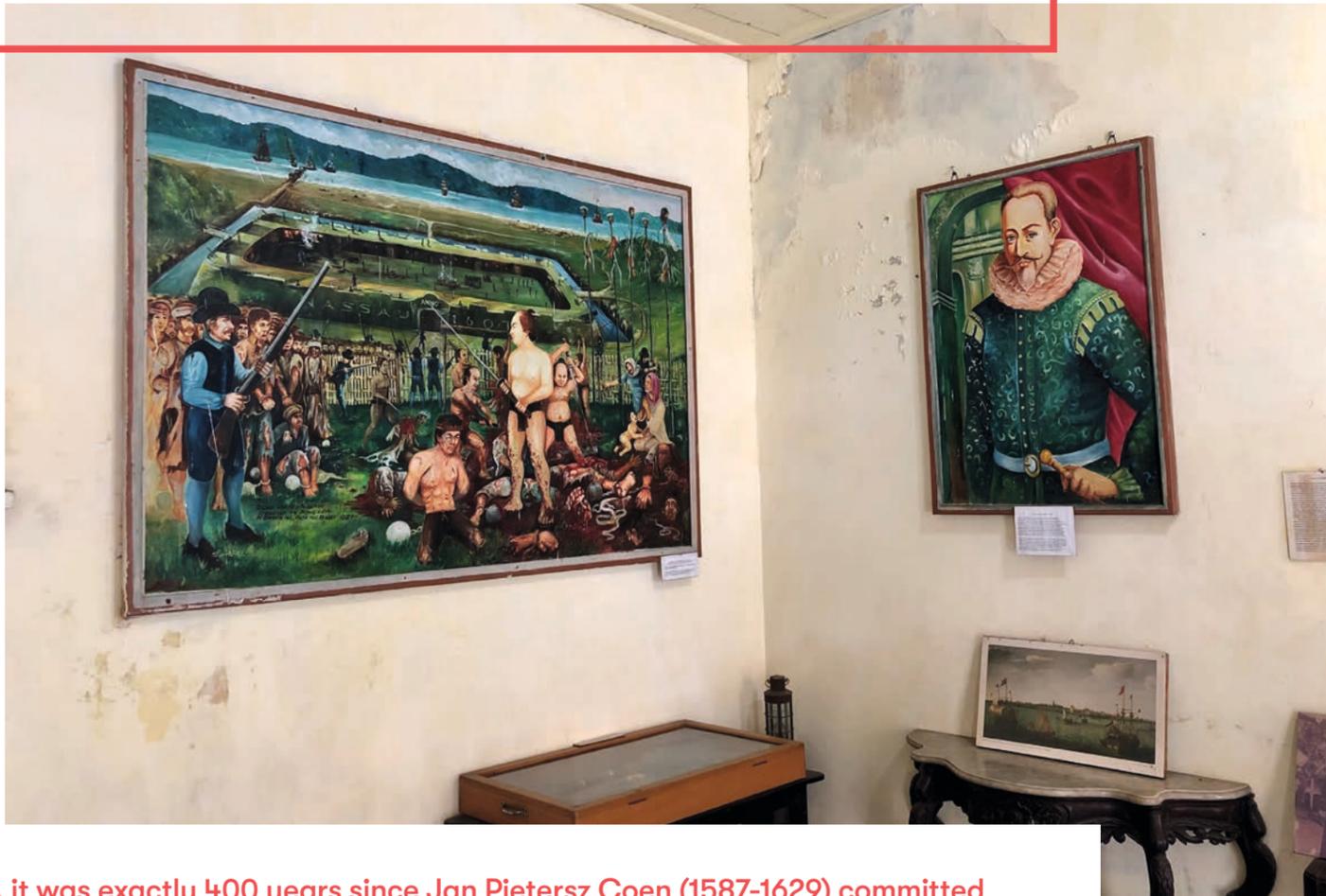


Fig1: Two paintings on display at the Rumah Budaya Banda Neira museum, including one of Jan Pietersz Coen (right) and one depicting a scene of colonial violence (left). Photograph by the author.

On 8 May 2021, it was exactly 400 years since Jan Pietersz Coen (1587-1629) committed a massacre on the Banda Islands in the Moluccas (Maluku Province), the only place where nutmeg grew at the time. In anticipation of this commemoration, the 1893 statue of Coen in the Dutch city of Hoorn, which dominates the town's central square (Roode Steen/Red Stone), was again the focus of much anger. In the nationalist-tinged late 19th century, people were looking for heroes from the past. The Aceh War had been raging hopelessly for years. The so-called "glory days" of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) were more than a century behind. As an exemplary figure who spearheaded Dutch entry into Asia, Coen was equated with his robust and determined gaze East. He was deemed to have paved the way for Dutch successes in the Spice Trade, and thus seemed ideally suited to fortify the continued belief in the Dutch colonial enterprise. Even when Coen's statue was placed on its pedestal, many criticized the glorification of a man with such a blood-soaked legacy. During a large protest near Hoorn's train station in June 2020, speakers drew attention to persistent discrimination and racism in the Netherlands in a broader sense. Recent events in the United States – in particular, the increasingly prominent Black Lives Matter movement and the public's reaction to the murder of George Floyd – were a source of inspiration.

The actions surrounding the image of JP Coen occur at a moment in which the Dutch colonial past and its disastrously brutal activities in the slave trade are increasingly under review. The Rijksmuseum recently opened a large-scale exhibition on slavery. A well-curated book that pays specific attention to the many slave-related objects in its collection has also been published.<sup>2</sup> Related publications often draw a direct line between this violent past and the institutionalized presence of racism in Dutch society. These sorts of historical reckonings can count on strong opposing sentiments: the same day as the aforementioned protest in Hoorn, a pro-Coen counter-demonstration was also held. Clad in Dutch flags with the VOC logo embroidered on them, a limited group of sympathizers gathered nearby, claiming an emotional bond with 'their Coen' and other Dutch colonial figures of an imaginary glorious past. The way in which Dutch colonial history is appropriated and employed in such protests is characterized by rather broad generalizations. Among the pro-Coen protesters, it seemed mainly about the idea that the Netherlands was built on

the acquired riches of the Dutch Golden Age. Heroes of yesteryear (e.g., Michiel de Ruijter (1607-1676), Piet Hein (1577-1629), JP Coen) were not to be dismissed as violent conquerors and slave traders. They should continue to be respected for the riches they brought home, the riches that continue to make the Netherlands one of the wealthiest nations on earth. On the other hand, 'four hundred years of Dutch imperialist rule' – as Gloria Wekker calls it in *White Innocence* (2016: 2) – cannot simply be erased. The consequences of such imperialism are still felt.

A number of recently published books offer new perspectives on Dutch colonialism and how it developed. Two of these studies – Adam Clulow's *Amboina, 1623*<sup>3</sup> and Alison Games' *Inventing the English Massacre*<sup>4</sup> – are about a relatively small event that would have far-reaching consequences for the Dutch Republic's relationship with England: the execution of 21 British East India Company (BEIC) employees and Japanese mercenaries by Dutch authorities on Ambon in 1623. Both books do more than describe the macabre events that unfolded on Ambon; they also try to explain how this massacre, as the English

referred to the incident, should be viewed from both a regional and European perspective. Together with two other books – the first dealing with the Anglo-Dutch conflicts of 1652-1689, the second with how the different companies related to one another – a complex, nuanced picture emerges of the early colonial period. Such works encourage reflection about the violent and uncompromising way colonial stakeholders sought to carve out a piece of the spice trade for themselves. Indirectly, however, these studies also caution against an over-emphasis on the might and supremacy of early colonizers.

## Ambon, 1623

Two years after JP Coen 'punished' the Banda islanders, a tragedy took place on Ambon that received far more attention in Europe. In 1623, Dutch authorities arrested a Japanese mercenary in service with the VOC for asking 'suspicious' questions about the local fort's defense capabilities. When he could not explain why this was of interest to him, he was tortured at length. Ultimately, he admitted to being part of a plan organized by English

traders to conquer the fort in question. Two weeks later, 21 men were executed on suspicion of involvement in the plot. Ten of these were traders employed by the British East India Company. When news reached London a year later, the 'massacre' not only became a symbol of Dutch aggressive, rude, and cruel behaviour, but also one explanation for why the English eventually began focusing on India as an alternative to present-day Indonesia.

Previous studies of the so-called 'Amboyna Massacre' mainly focus on the underlying cause—that is, the truth (or falsity) of the alleged conspiracy. In this, perspectives were rather divided along national lines. Dutch authors insisted that the English were scheming to take over the fort. In contrast, English authors were invariably convinced that, even if there had been a plot against the Dutch, the Amboyna Massacre was nevertheless a miscarriage of justice. Both publications rather pleasingly avoid this question altogether. Clulow's *Amboina, 1623* emphasizes the Asian regional context in which the Dutch operated at the time. This produces a history that counteracts narratives of the VOC reigning supreme from the start. Following in the footsteps of pathbreaking studies like J.C. Sharman's *Empires of the Weak*,<sup>5</sup> Clulow shows how the Dutch actually began in a much weaker position than previously assumed. Fear and paranoia prevailed, fueled by a lack of regional knowledge, ambiguity about previous agreements, and the imminent presence of potential competitors (such as the English). One could, therefore, interpret the torture and subsequent executions of 1623 as the result of a collective Dutch panic attack (though this should by no means be read as an excuse or explanation for other atrocities committed locally).

## Japanese mercenaries

In the first part of his book, Adam Clulow returns to the period of JP Coen to show how the history of the Banda Islands and Ambon are intertwined. After discussing why the spices of the so-called Spice Islands were so sought-after in Europe, Clulow explores how the Dutch started to interfere in the trade of nutmeg.

A variety of treaties were supposed to guarantee the VOC's monopoly position, but whether the local elite actually understood what was in those treaties is another matter. This signals an issue of communication and translation that we will more often encounter in Clulow's masterful account. The Dutch often had a rather limited overview of their situation. The example of Japanese mercenaries employed by the VOC further underscores this point.

How did twelve Japanese mercenaries end up working for the VOC on Ambon? According to Clulow, these Japanese mercenaries were part of an experiment to make convenient use of surplus manpower in Asia. After the bloody Sengoku period (1467-1568), there were plenty of unemployed men in southern Japan. Stationed in Hirado, the VOC saw an opportunity to replenish its short supply of men defending their enterprises. Japanese mercenaries, for example, played a central role in the beheadings of the *orangkaya* on Banda Neira. Upon entering Neira's only museum today, one is immediately greeted by a horrific depiction of these men decapitating locals, all under the stern gaze of VOC staff.

It is here that *Amboina, 1623* reads like a sequel to Clulow's earlier *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan*,<sup>6</sup> in which he presents a detailed analysis of that Dutch period in Hirado (1609-1641). The book leaves an indelible impression of the way the Japanese themselves determined the contours of the relationship and how limited the influence of the VOC was in this. Particularly striking are the descriptions of the complex 'pilgrimages' that the VOC undertook annually from the deep south all the way to Edo (present-day Tokyo) from 1633 onwards. The journey of about two thousand kilometers lasted three months and resulted in a mere two- to three-week stay in the capital. The shogun himself would never reveal himself to the men, instead remaining invisible behind a screen. After endless waiting in the palace, the VOC representative was ordered to pay respect to the shogun by prostrating himself on the floor. Countless gifts were exchanged, which made the trip home considerably lighter but for the thirty kimonos that they usually received in exchange. The only way of knowing how well the gifts were appreciated by the court was by where the representative was asked to prostrate himself the following year. When he was once asked to do so outside the palace itself, it was clear there that there was work to be done.

The analysis that Clulow offers in *The Company and the Shogun* underlines how relatively weak the VOC's position was in Japan. The situation on Ambon reverberates with this. The presence of the English on Ambon was a painful reminder of their precarious position in the region. The playing field in which they found themselves was characterised by a jumble of regional alliances and conflicts that brought uncertainty as well as the potential for violence. For the Dutch, the English undermined the VOC and took advantage of the hard work the Dutch had put in to secure their local position. Prior to the massacre, the Dutch appeared to perceive the English as profiteers. After 1623, the reporting in England would mainly focus on the inhumane behaviour of the Dutch. It is here that Alison Games' *Inventing the English Massacre* offers a wealth of additional insight.

## A massacre invented

Already before 1621, the relationship between the Dutch Republic and England had known ups and downs. The conflict between the Habsburg ('Spanish') Empire and the Republic played a prominent role in this. During the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621) there were significant concerns about a possible Anglo-Spanish alliance. This contrasted with the perspective of the English, who relied firmly on the assumption that the Republic owed England gratitude for the military support it had received under Elizabeth I (1533-1603). This was compounded by a certain disdain toward this new European state sans royal family. As Games argues, the positions of both countries were incompatible at heart. The VOC was of the opinion that the English held no claim to a stake in the spice trade; the English were adamant that the Dutch owed them gratitude.

*Inventing the English Massacre* particularly excels in its analysis of the countless pamphlets and other texts produced on the English side about the conflict. The effects of such representations could color the relationship between the two countries for centuries to come. In particular, the use of the term 'massacre' has Games' special attention. In the 17th century, the term mainly referred to a violent death in which the deceased was attributed martyrdom.

By drawing attention to the torture endured by the English men at the hands of the Dutch (and the miscarriage of justice that characterized the trial), it was possible to apply the 'massacre' label to the happenings as a whole. Strikingly, the British East India Company seemed well aware that the torture and executions did not actually have the character of a massacre like the Jamestown/Indian Massacre of 1622, in which a quarter (347) of the inhabitants perished at the hands of a local tribe. Nor was it comparable to the carnage associated with religious wars. Labeling the events as the 'Amboyna Massacre' not only made the men in question martyrs, but also illustrated how much the English and Dutch differed from each other as a people. While recent books such as Shashi Tharoor's *Inglorious Empire*,<sup>7</sup> William Dalrymple's *The Anarchy*,<sup>8</sup> and Sathnam Sanghera's *Empireland*<sup>9</sup> have all fiercely argued against the idea of a civilized English colonial power (and one from which former colonies actually benefited), Clulow and Games show how complicated and entangled the relationships truly were. Alison Games' elegant approach to the concept of massacre, and how it enabled the British to paint an extremely negative picture of the Dutch, helps develop a better understanding of the often sketchy representation of Dutch colonial history itself. For one, it is still common to encounter the argument that, under Coen's reign, the Banda Islands were not just depopulated, but that their fifteen thousand inhabitants were in fact murdered. While there is no doubt that thousands of Bandanese died as a result of the violence meted out by the Dutch, some

escaped to the eastern Kei Islands, at least temporarily. This does not detract from Coen's extremely bloody legacy, but rather underlines the normative way colonial history is employed to make a point. As a result, Coen becomes someone who paved the way for a 400-year colonial empire, which has never quite existed as such.

## How to outsource an empire

Here, the two other recent publications provide a necessary framework to understand this early (Dutch) colonial period. In *Outsourcing Empire*,<sup>10</sup> co-authors Andrew Phillips and J.C. Sharman present an intriguing overview of the various companies that embarked on journeys of conquest and colonization. In particular, they address the underlying institutional logic of these companies in order to gain a deeper perspective of how they functioned in practice. Clearly, the VOC contrasts with other companies in terms of its approach. The co-authors argue that the company states, as they refer to them, could arise out of a context characterized by an amalgamation of sovereignty relationships in which the power of rulers was often shared with a whole plethora of actors, ranging from churches to city administrations. This power was not territorially bound or separated on

the basis of public and private domains as would become de rigueur later. Where Clulow and Games are concerned with the relations between the VOC/Republic and BEIC/England, *Outsourcing Empire* enables the reader to reflect on a much broader context. Through the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), the Portuguese and Spaniards had tried to divide the world

among themselves hundreds of years earlier. Where the Spaniards would largely ignore Asia, Portugal with its base in Goa played a dominant role in the spice trade in the Indian ocean for a long time. Before the Dutch and English set foot on Moluccan shores, the Portuguese had preceded them. Such a *longue durée* view of history makes it possible to draw connections between, on the one hand, shifts in (territorial) power in Europe itself, and, on the other, the way various companies operated under the mandates with which they had been bestowed.

## Reframing 'empire'

The negative image the English had of the Dutch would persist for centuries, not least because of the regularly updated pamphlets which were circulated. Gradually, the martyrdom and horrors that the English endured on Ambon cemented the idea of an extremely brutal VOC that contrasted markedly with the far more civilized dealings of the BEIC. The three Anglo-Dutch wars, fought by the two countries between 1652-1674, reinforced this image. The collection *War, Trade and the State*,<sup>11</sup> edited by David Ormrod and Gijs Rommelse, stretches its analysis till 1689, the year in which the Glorious Revolution took place. At the invitation of a number of Protestant leaders, that year William III of Orange-Nassau and his wife Maria Stuart were appointed king-couple of England, Ireland, and Scotland.

*War, Trade and the State* is especially interesting for anyone who wants to better understand how the first three Anglo-Dutch wars shaped relationships to come. The first half of the book discusses how these wars took place in the North Sea. The various chapters deal with the European context in which the conflict unfolded, the role that the English royal family played in this, the way politics developed in the Republic, and how the two armies related to each other. The focus then turns to the Atlantic Ocean and Asia, with specific contributions detailing the way the wars impacted the Caribbean Islands, North America, and the Bandas. Although the 'massacre' of 1623 took place a few decades before the first Anglo-Dutch War (1652-1654), it is nevertheless important to understand

these three wars in terms of a historical continuum which contributed to the way the world would take shape in geopolitical terms. The famous Treaty of Breda (1667) shows what was at stake territorially after the Dutch had won the second war. The possession of the small nutmeg-rich Banda island of Run was used to regulate the status of a whole series of territories, including New Amsterdam (which became New York) and Suriname.

## Conclusion

Of the Bandas, the islet of Run is still the hardest to reach. Although there continue to be nutmeg plantations on the island, they no longer play any role of significance in trade of the spice. The Bandas long ago lost their status as the only place where nutmeg grew. Run plays a central role in Giles Milton's bestseller *Nathaniel's Nutmeg*,<sup>12</sup> which narrates the story of the heroic Nathaniel Goldthorpe (1585-1620) fighting a lonely battle against the Dutch to retake the island. Both Clulow's and Games' analyses of the Amboyna Massacre show how much this negative stereotyping of the Dutch continues to speak to the imagination. Such stereotypes imagine an enlightened English colonizer who, with its honesty and humility, sharply contrasts with the ill-mannered and violent Dutch. Reading Milton's account, one cannot but hope for the Bandanese that they will soon enjoy the many benefits of their benign British overlords.

Both *Outsourcing Empire* and *War, Trade and the State* underline the importance of analyzing the events that took place on Ambon in 1623 within a broader framework of (European) geopolitical change. Together with Adam Clulow and Alison Games' detailed and insightful studies, they also function as an important caution against all too easy simplifications about the colonial period itself. When we speak of four hundred years of imperialist rule, like Gloria Wekker does, what is it that we mean? While her seminal book *White Innocence* underlines the length and impact of Dutch colonialism, it fails to capture the complexity of this enterprise itself and runs the risk of contributing to inaccurate ideas about Dutch colonial 'might.' Now that movements such as those defending the continued presence of the statue of JP Coen in Hoorn increasingly draw upon a discourse of national pride associated with Dutch colonialism, it is important that we continue to be critical about the assumptions this builds on.

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## Notes

- 1 The author would like to thank Tristan Mostert for important input on this article. An earlier version of this article appeared in *De Nederlandse Boekengids*, issue 3 (June-July), 2021.
- 2 Rijksmuseum. 2021. *Slavery*. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum/Atlas Contact.
- 3 Clulow, A. 2019. *Amboina, 1623: Fear Conspiracy on the Edge of Empire*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 4 Games, A. 2020. *Inventing the English Massacre*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 5 Sharman, J.C. 2019. *Empires of the Weak: The Real Story of European Expansion and the Creation of the New World Order*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 6 Clulow, A. 2013. *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 7 Tharoor, S. 2017. *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India*. London: Penguin.
- 8 Dalrymple, W. 2020. *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company*. London: Bloomsbury.
- 9 Sanghera, S. 2021. *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain*. London: Penguin.
- 10 Phillips, A. & Sharman, J.C. 2020. *Outsourcing Empire: How Company-States Made the Modern World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 11 Ormrod, D. & Rommelse, G. 2020. *War, Trade and the State - Anglo-Dutch Conflict, 1652-88*. Suffolk: Boydell Press.
- 12 Milton, G. 1999. *Nathaniel's Nutmeg. How One Man's Courage Changed the Course of History*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.



Fig2: The statue of Jan Pietersz Coen in Hoorn. Image reproduced under a Creative Commons licence courtesy of a WikiCommons user.



# Contesting the imagined preman

Andy Fuller

Some six months into the Covid pandemic, I took up a digital subscription with *Kompas*, a national Indonesian newspaper. I realized that there was little chance for fieldwork in the near future, and thus that I should be more disciplined in my reading of Indonesian-language media. The newspaper's imagery and reportage contrasted greatly with my immediate surroundings, a practically Covid-free Melbourne. Instead, *Kompas* documented hospitals at capacity, the deaths of health workers, the rapidly filling graveyards in Jakarta, and the sudden need to build more on the city's fringes. Such a stress on everyday urban needs spoke volumes against the relative vagueness of the nation's statistics on Covid cases and deaths. But, of course, there were many similarities to my situation in Melbourne: the need to 'flatten the curve', the constant press-conferences from local politicians stating that everything was under control, the implementation of lockdowns, and the exhortations for everyone to wash their hands and to practice social distancing.

Something else, however, soon caught my eye. The Indonesian Chief of Police, the *Kepala Polri*, had devised the tactic of 'embracing' *preman* in the service of implementing lockdowns and holding people to account for contravening Covid protocols. Immediately, national newspapers, *Kompas* and *Tempo*, picked up on this gripping and controversial development. *Preman*, I feel, has no apparent direct translation. It indicates a broad spectrum of personas, ranging from noble bandit to outright criminal who gains his wealth from extorting others and propagating his macho and violent reputation. A kind-hearted renegade at best, a nasty thug who does the dirty work of politicians at worst. *Preman* is a term that has strong resonance in the national imagination. The ubiquity and ambiguity of the figure of the 'preman' lends itself easily to the imagination of a city riddled with crime, violence, and an indistinct but influential underworld.

*Preman* are routinely the targets of police operations aimed at 'eradication' (*pemberantasan*). So, it may seem strange to see reporting that they have been 'embraced' by the police. But it reflects an ongoing tension between contesting and being co-operative in the extension of state authority. This ambivalent position of *preman* also relates to their contested position in cultural products and discourses: literature, film, mass media. It is for this reason that

I turn to the arts as a means to further our understanding of who is a *preman* and what makes up *premanisme*.

The various ways in which *preman* are represented, for me, provokes memories of relying on 'informal street workers' who have provided me with impromptu information or directions while making my way through Jakarta's streets. Security guards (*satpam*), motorcycle taxi drivers (*tukang ojek*), parking attendants, and others are vital resources

of street-level knowledge in Jakarta. They are also sometimes implicated in so-called *preman* activities. Wilson, writing on the Forum Betawi Rempug (FBR), points to their role as protection racket, where FBR members take up jobs in enforcing local security.<sup>1</sup> The post-Authoritarian era has seen a proliferation of *preman*-like organisations, some adopting Islamic accoutrements.

I have started working with various cultural products to counter my Covid-imposed

separation from Jakarta and the difficulty of doing 'on-the-ground' fieldwork, and also to structure a kind of cultural genealogy of the (imagined) *preman*. I relate the effort of 'making do' through a variety of means of gathering data to the practice of 'patchwork methodology'.<sup>2</sup> Below, I highlight some selected imaginings of *preman* and *premanisme*. I use a few case studies to explore how the idea of *preman* is a 'floating signifier' with meanings which change over time and space, in accordance with changing social and political conditions.

Ryter (1998, p.49-51) traces the trajectory of the term to the Dutch *vrijman* – referring to a freed slave.<sup>3</sup> The term's early meanings also take in a sense of 'being off duty', or, 'civvies' (*berbaju preman*). A policeman could become a *preman* through the change of clothing, adopting a new identity and role. The contested nature of the term *preman* is also evident through the presence of terms with similar meanings such as *gali* and *jago*. *Gali-gali* (in its plural form) means 'roving gangs', while *jago* refers to a kind of rural bandit, sometimes in the guise of a Robin Hood-esque figure. In the late 1990s, the term *preman* took on the connotation of *gali-gali*, which was more common during the 1980s – particularly at the height of the Petrus – *penembak misterius* (mysterious killings)– campaign. Ryter points out, however, that *preman* could more easily stand as 'a lone figure' as well as having



Fig. 1 (above): Market alley in Jakarta, Indonesia. Image reproduced courtesy of [Anthoni Askaria](#) on Unsplash.

Fig. 2 (left): Poster for the 1954 film *Lewat Djam Malam*.

a 'quasi-official ring'. Being a *preman* as such meant having established a degree of authority and respect, which may have not been afforded to the *gali-gali*, violent but disorganised thugs.

### The disciplined *preman*

Lewat *Djam Malam (After the Curfew)*, a 1954 film by Usmar Ismail set during the Revolutionary Era (1945-1949), depicts the fate of ex-guerrilla fighter Iskandar as he attempts to settle back into urban life in Bandung, having left the nearby mountains where he was fighting against the Dutch. Iskandar continues to suffer the trauma of the violence and his role in unwittingly killing civilians. Upon returning to civilian life, he attempts to resume his relationship with his fiancé. He is aided in finding a job in the governor's office, yet finds himself ostracized. He quickly alienates himself through resorting to violence to solve his disputes with fellow government officials.<sup>4</sup>

Iskandar is in turn feted for his bravery and condemned for his reputation for violence. Back in Bandung, he takes revenge against his commander, who used the loot of war to fund his post-independence businesses. Iskandar is both heroic and flawed. He is unable to settle down to respectability or to continue as a mercenary gun for hire. His violence needs to be motivated by a moral reasoning. An old fellow-fighter, who has transitioned into the formal police, however, asks him jealously, "Are you happy, living the good life of a *preman*?" He sees only Iskandar's detachment and independence, rather than his trauma and inability to move on from his past.

While Iskandar's fiancé and friends enjoy parties, the fruits of emerging middle-class consumption, and respectability in the newly independent nation, Iskandar finds himself dislocated from those around him. He can't enjoy these urban pleasures. His cohort are those who have also not found comfort in the transition from the contested to newly realized nation. After taking his revenge on his commander and trying to escape from possible capture, Iskandar is caught for breaking the curfew (*avondklok*). In his attempt to avoid arrest, he is shot and lies dying on the steps of his fiancé's house. The 'good life' of the *preman* is short lived. Iskandar's *premanisme* is subjected to the disciplining and ordering forces of the newly independent nation. As is echoed in recent statements from Idham Azis, the head of the national police, 'the state cannot be defeated by *preman*'.<sup>5</sup>

### Literary *preman* and ethical interventions

Newspapers have long facilitated the emergence and structures of Indonesian language literature. The rise of a national literature is inseparable from the role

of newspapers in Jakarta and other cities throughout Indonesia. Newspapers have proven to be one of the most fundamental elements of Indonesian literary infrastructure: providing space for short stories, poetry, critical reviews, and advertisements of events. Sunday editions of newspapers such as *Kompas*, *Republika*, *Suara Pembaruan*, *Jawa Pos*, and *Koran Tempo* have long featured short stories of notable and emerging writers. Having one's stories published in various newspapers is a vital step for authors to establish their credentials and reputations in the literary scene. Some have described Indonesian literature as being synonymous with *sastra koran* (newspaper literature) – a literature, that is, with narratives, settings and contexts that relate immediately to contemporary events. With their urban bases, these stories have a largely urban focus, often relegating rural, peripheral, and non-Jakarta/non-Javanese life to a kind of quaint afterthought.

The close connection between newspapers and literary production also saw a number of stories dealing with both the state-orchestrated killings of *gali-gali/preman* and the rise of *preman*-like literary figures. Seno Gumira Ajidarma (b.1958), who started work as a journalist in Jakarta during the early 1980s, having come from Yogyakarta, was one of the first authors to rise to prominence on the back of *sastra koran* and to directly engage with chronicling the various forms of state violence of the Suharto-led New Order regime. Seno's 1993 collection, *Penembak Misterius*,<sup>6</sup> based on stories written during the 1980s, depicts multilayered urban fears which are directed towards the practice of roaming thugs and the violence of the state. The *preman* is an ambivalent figure: capable of perpetuating violence towards other members of the urban poor, while also claiming to mediate the threat of violence and oppression from the state. Writing in the context of Latin American literature, Dabove speaks of the tendency of elite literature to offer a more sympathetic reading of the figure of the 'social bandit'.<sup>7</sup> Seno's writing, emblematic of literary fiction, also adopts a sympathetic reading of the *preman* as a contemporary outlaw.

Seno's story, 'The Perempuan Preman' ('The Female Preman'),<sup>8</sup> is one such story that not only offers a heroic imagining of the *preman* but also explores the problematic of urban order and authority. Almost universally regarded as a male figure, Seno's female character is used to explore the complexities of urban ordering, violence, and policing. The figure of the female *preman* 'works' in the district of Melawai in south Jakarta, near the entertainment district of Blok M.<sup>9</sup> Like any *preman* worth her salt, the titular *Perempuan Preman* has a reputation for violence which has become part of the local mythology. Her legendary acts of violence and intervention are the subject of songs sung by the local street

Fig. 3 (right): A police box (*pondok polisi*) at the entrance to Merdeka Square, Jakarta, Indonesia. Image reproduced courtesy of CÉphoto, Uwe Aranas on WikiCommons.

Fig. 4 (below): The urban sprawl of Jakarta, Indonesia. Image reproduced courtesy of Voicu Horațiu on Unsplash.



buskers (*pengamen*). The character evokes the mythology of the social bandit (as devised by Hobsbawm<sup>10</sup>): a vigilante, operating outside of the law and creating their own sense of justice. Seno's story shows how the state has lost its monopoly on violence. The female *preman* not only fights against the extortionate acts of male *preman*, but also against the police who violate the rights and lives of local women. The *preman*, in this case, is viewed sympathetically, as a crusader for social justice, who is capable of circumventing police authority.

Writing during a kind of heyday of *premanisme* and a concerted campaign against suspected *preman*,<sup>11</sup> Seno's works represent *preman* as both victims of state violence as well as perpetrators of everyday low-level criminality and extortion. The targeted killings of accused *preman* between 1982-1985 in various Indonesian cities formed the context for Seno's 'Bunyi Hujan di Atas Genting' ('The Sound of Rain on Roof Tiles'). Here, Sawitri, a former-prostitute waits in a constant state of fear, realising that her partner (a local *preman*) has become a victim of the 'mysterious killings'. After each rain storm passes, she looks out of her window onto a narrow alley to see a corpse splayed out. The corpse is tattooed, and her neighbours crowd around, celebrating the killing of another *preman*: 'now he knows how it feels', they celebrate. Sawitri feels that the killers targeted the victims' tattoos; disfiguring them deliberately. This materiality of the tattooed body identifies the victim irrevocably as a *preman* and in turn a potential target of the state's campaign.

Although the portrayal from Seno is sympathetic to the partner who is left behind, the *preman* is shown to be an outcaste and extortionist rather than a benevolent Robin Hood-esque brigand. Pamuji, as a *preman*, is imagined in the sense of a 'professional'; it is his 'line of work'. The *preman* may also stand for the 'underclass': he is a part of the same world as those he intimidates. As Ryter states, "preman, having nothing to sell but their own muscles, have a right to be cut in on the take

give given the lack of economic alternatives. Extortion is, in effect, their line of work".<sup>12</sup> This sympathetic portrayal of the urban underclass is consistent throughout Seno's writings, where he frequently depicts the agency of the urban poor in shaping their own livelihoods.

### Contesting the imagined *preman*

The *preman* is a contested figure with origins in earlier iconic figures like the brigand and bandit. The *preman*, characterised as a vigilante, operating 'outside of the law' (*di luar pemerintahan*), is nonetheless frequently co-opted and embraced by the state. Such an embrace is fleeting and tenuous: as is evident through state campaigns to draw on their authority, while, at other times, seeking to have them wiped out (*dibasmi*) and to almost seasonally launch programs of eradication (*pemberantasan*). As such, I argue that the *preman* is an entangled and ambivalent figure: created through nationalist mythology and a variety of textual discourses, enabled through the conditions of Indonesia's urbanism. The *preman* proves to be adaptable: becoming reconfigured at each moment of crisis, whether it be the time of the Revolution, the Massacre of the alleged communists from 1965-66, the *reformasi* movement and more frequently in the post-Authoritarian era, and the current Covid pandemic. Literary works by Seno Gumira Ajidarma, amongst others, provide a vital resource for understanding how *preman* are imagined and contested.

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#### Notes

- 1 Wilson, Ian Douglas. 2008. "As long as its halal: Islamic *preman* in Jakarta" in Greg Fealy and Sally White (eds.), *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, pp.192-210.
- 2 See: <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography> and <https://entanglementsjournal.org/the-case-for-letting-anthropology-be-quarantined-covid-and-the-end-of-ethnographic-presence/>
- 3 Ryter, Loren. 1998. "Pemuda Pancasila: The Last Loyalist Free Men of Suharto's Order?" *Indonesia* 66: 43-68.
- 4 The plight of ex-fighters is also explored in the 1952 film *Embun* (Dew), by D.Djajakusuma, also produced by Perfini.
- 5 Azis served as Chief of the Indonesian National Police between 2019-2021.
- 6 Ajidarma, Seno Gumira. 1993. *Penembak Misterius*, Yogyakarta: Galang Press.
- 7 Dabove, Juan Pablo. 2007. *Nightmares of the Lettered City: Banditry and Literature in Latin America, 1816-1929*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- 8 Ajidarma, Seno Gumira. 2001. *Dunia Sukab*, Kompas: Jakarta.
- 9 Seno tells me the story is based on a real encounter. "I did see her passing by the gudeg stall in Melawai."
- 10 Hobsbawm, Eric, *Bandits*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969.
- 11 This was known as *Petrus*: mysterious killings, from the *tembak misterius*.
- 12 Ryter 1998, p. 49.



# Philippine literature, digital humanities and distant learning

Diana Arbaiza, Rocío Ortuño,  
Cristina Guillén and Emilio Vivó

**Barely 20 years ago, scholars of Philippine literature in Spanish struggled to be noticed in Hispanic and Asian studies while facing numerous challenges around the preservation of Philippine textual heritage. The current project DigiPhiLit<sup>1</sup> not only demonstrates that the field is thriving, but also that it has the potential to normalize the study of Philippine literature at universities offering Spanish programs.**

## Philippine literature in Spanish for a global audience

From the 1880s, Filipino authors began to write works in Spanish. Some of them criticized the colonial administrations (first the Spanish one and then the American one) and laid the foundations of nation-building. The usage of Spanish outlasted Spanish rule, continuing through the American rule from 1898 and extending well into the 1940s. It became the literary language of postcolonial expression, deployed by a wide range of writers: from the poets who produced their own Filipino modernist poetry in the early 20th century to the women authors rewriting stereotypical portraits of Filipino women in the 1930s and claiming their right to vote. This extremely rich corpus is nonetheless relatively unknown in the Philippines as well as in the field of Hispanic studies. With the disappearance of the Spanish language in the Philippines, only the most canonical of these works have been translated and widely received among Filipinos (e.g., José Rizal's (1861-1896) novels). Within Hispanic studies, until quite recently, the Philippines has been an extremely peripheral area, with its literature completely absent from even PhD programs.

For decades, some scholars undertook a stoic effort of categorizing and analyzing this corpus with little impact on Hispanic or even Philippine Studies. By the early 21st century, this scenario changed thanks to the burgeoning of Hispanic-Asian studies and the visibility and accessibility provided by the digitization of these texts. The number of studies on Philippine literature in Spanish has soared in the last ten years. As Hispanic studies became a more inclusive and decentered field, the Philippines is finally gaining long awaited attention. However, whilst institutions of higher education

realize the need to offer curricula that reflect transcultural connections and include marginalized areas such as Asia and Africa in Hispanic studies, most universities still face several challenges for integrating the Philippines into their programs. Despite the academic vitality on this subject, there are not yet enough professors who specialize on Philippine Literature in Spanish nor teaching materials on works that until recently had been neglected.

DigiPhiLit is an initiative that responds to these structural problems, aiming to fully put Philippine literature in Spanish on the map. It does so by taking advantage of the growth in Digital Humanities and the potential of distance learning didactics. Funded with an Erasmus Plus grant by the European Union (2020-2023), five universities, coordinated by the University of Antwerp (Belgium), constitute the knowledge network: Université of Clermont-Auvergne (France), Université Paris Nanterre (France), Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Spain), UNED (Spain), and Ateneo de Manila University (Philippines).

The rationale is to create materials and train professionals in order to facilitate the integration of Philippine Literature in Spanish in the curricula of Higher Education institutions. For this purpose, the project plans several actions. One of the most outstanding is the creation of a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) on this subject. A free course that will be offered in January 2022 as an elective in some universities, but that will also be available for secondary schools and the wider public interested in the topic. By now, most of us are used to "emergency" distant learning, but we would like this course to be more than just a series of videos. On the contrary, we aim to improve interactivity in distant learning. Thus, we will be organizing some training activities on this to apply our newly acquired knowledge to the MOOC.

We have also planned some summer schools on Philippine Literature in Spanish. These are mainly aimed at PhD students interested in the field, and at scholars specialized from related fields, so that they can include Philippine Literature topics in their courses. As soon as our current pandemic world is left behind, we will organize training events in the campuses of the participating universities in Antwerp, Paris, Clermont-Ferrand, Madrid, and Manila.

Building upon the materials designed for this MOOC, DigiPhiLit will also publish an Introduction to Philippine Literature in Spanish, a volume that will cull from the expertise of some of the scholars involved in the project as well as from other specialists in the field at universities in Asia, Europe, and the United States. It has been a long while since a history of the Philippine Literature in Spanish has been published. In 1993, Edgardo Tiamson published *A Re-appreciation of Philippine Literature in Spanish*. Before that, in 1974, Luis Mariñas wrote *La literatura filipina en castellano*, a brief book published in Madrid by a diplomat of the Spanish Francoist regime. Therefore, we view the companion as a good opportunity to reassess the history of this literature, especially now that more documents are available for researchers around the world thanks to the digital efforts carried out by institutions

such as the University of Santo Tomás, the University of Michigan, the Spanish National Library, and Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes. The availability of books comes hand-in-hand with the growing field of Digital Humanities, which provides new insights into texts through their digital analysis.

In this sense, DigiPhiLit draws on recent and ongoing projects that use digital methodologies to preserve, provide visibility, and analyze Philippine Literature in Spanish. Previous efforts made from the University of Antwerp in partnership with the University of the Philippines include PhilPeriodicals,<sup>2</sup> a project for digitizing rare periodicals from the University of the Philippines Library and publishing them online in a freely accessible repository funded by the Flemish Agency for Academic Cooperation (VLIRUOS). The project also provides training in Digital Humanities to work with this repository. A connected initiative is Filiteratura,<sup>3</sup> a database on Philippine literature in Spanish (and literature in Spanish on the Philippines), which includes information (and the location) of books and newspapers, as well as information on authors, publishing houses, and awards. Our partners in UNED also have extensive experience in digital projects related to literary studies, as do some of our external assessors such as Gaspar Vibal, the CO of Vibal Foundation. He is the hand behind WikiPilipinas,<sup>4</sup> an online encyclopedia dedicated to the Philippines, and Filipiniana.net, a digital library which in the 2010s spent considerable effort publishing long out-of-print Hispano-Filipino books. As its initial offering to the public this year, Filipiniana.net will be launching the *Documentos del Quincentenario* in September 2021. This is a microsite with freely accessible documents, webinars, articles and links to books that provide a better understanding of the significance of Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521) and Juan Sebastián Elcano's (1486/87-1526) first circumnavigation of the earth in 1521 for the Philippines.<sup>5</sup> In this second stage, the project is captained by Jorge Mojarro, also a member of our external assessors committee.

## The Philippines and beyond

Among the members of DigiPhiLit, there are outstanding academics in Philippine Studies, but also literary scholars who specialize in areas such as Spain, Latin America, and Africa. The project was thus designed to avoid perpetuating the isolation of Philippine studies. This project highlights the connections of Philippine heritage with other literary and cultural productions in the global Hispanic world. The scope of DigiPhiLit is also global: it hopes to make Philippine literature available for a world audience, but also to provide methods, examples, and resources on how to take advantage of Digital Humanities for the teaching of literature in Higher Education. Apart from the concrete outputs on Philippine Literature, DigiPhiLit will also publish an open-source online guide about good practices in teaching literature in distance learning, several articles describing the process of setting up a MOOC, and a guide for the inclusion of Digital Humanities in the teaching of literature in Spanish.

We also need to take into account the isolation of this literature within the Philippines. As mentioned above, despite being a very valuable heritage, this corpus of works is no longer understood in the country. The association with Ateneo de Manila will overcome this problem, as they will be responsible for translating the subtitles of the MOOC into both English and Filipino. In this way, the resource will be accessible for Filipinos interested in their own culture, even if they do not understand Spanish. There are also plans for translating some of the corpus through the use of automatic translation.

As part of its outreach objective, DigiPhiLit will organize a symposium on distance learning in higher education (December 2022) as well as two workshops on Digital Humanities in the teaching of literature. The first of these workshops took place between February 8-24 2021, offering six free sessions in which trainers from Spain, Latin America, and the United States covered a wide range of digital tools and applications to the study of literature: digital corpus creation, named entity tagging, text-mining, corpus linguistics applied to literary studies, network representation and topic modeling. More than 150 scholars registered for this first workshop. The presenters as well as the participants used a variety of literary sources, not just limited to Philippine literature in Spanish. The second of these workshops will be held in February 2022.

With these projects, DigiPhiLit aims at narrowing the gap between research trends and educational practices in the Humanities, providing didactic tools that are fundamental for the growth of Philippine Studies but that will also greatly benefit scholars who work on literature from other regions. Nonetheless, it is important not to underestimate the potential impact for these workshops to render visible this particular Asian literature: for some of the participants, the fact that these events are organized within the general frame of DigiPhiLit will constitute a first familiarization with the existence of Philippine literature in Spanish. DigiPhiLit intends to finally reverse the narrative, making Philippine studies in Spanish not just the perpetually upcoming field, but a consolidated study area that can set new models for the teaching of literature.

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## Notes

- <https://digiphilit.uantwerpen.be>
- <https://hosting.uantwerpen.be/philperiodicals>
- <https://filiteratura.uantwerpen.be>
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WikiPilipinas>
- <https://www.vibalgroupp.com/quincentenario>



Fig. 1: José Rizal Monument, Rizal Park, Manila, Luzon, Philippines. Reproduced under a Creative Commons license courtesy of Gary Todd on Flickr.

# Nearly 1000 submissions in nine languages

The Ninth (2021) ICAS Book Prize Edition

Paul van der Velde

The ICAS Book Prize (IBP) was established in 2003 by the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS). In addition to the English edition with which it all started, we included publications in Chinese, German, French, and Korean for the seventh edition and, for the eighth edition, a combined Spanish/Portuguese prize. The diversification of languages for the IBP is further extended by the addition of Japanese and Russian editions for this ninth edition, which brings the total to eight editions representing nine languages. If more languages will be added in the future remains to be seen and is primarily dependent on a sizable output of Asian studies publications in a given language. With this multilingual approach, in cooperation with a host of partners and sponsors worldwide, ICAS is increasingly decentring the landscape of knowledge about and in Asia. With this approach in mind the ICAS Secretariat also founded the Africa-Asia Book Prize and organised two editions (2015 / 2018). The future editions will be coordinated by the Association for Asian Studies in Africa (A-Asia) in cooperation with the recently founded Centre for Asian Studies at the University of Ghana.

## The IBP Partners

The following ten institutions in Asia, Latin America and Europe either organise or sponsor the respective language editions. CATS, Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (German Edition), GIS Asie, French Academic Network on Asian Studies (French Edition), ICAS, IIAS and the Asian Library at Leiden University (English Edition and Japanese Edition), IFES, Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences (Russian Edition), NCU, National Chengchi University (Chinese Edition), SEPHIS, The South-South Exchange Program for Research on the History of Development (Spanish/Portuguese Edition), Society for Hong Kong Studies (Hong Kong Article Prize Edition) and SNUAC, Seoul National University Asia Center (Korean Edition).

The secretariat of each edition, consisting of a secretary and an acting secretary, in cooperation with the IBP Secretariat at ICAS, puts together a Reading Committee consisting of scholars in diverse disciplines, focusing on various regions, working on and originating from different continents: a composition that reflects the transcending nature of ICAS.<sup>1</sup> Each secretariat succeeded in finding enthusiastic members for their respective Reading Committees and has persuaded publishers and periodicals in the field of Asian studies to submit their publications. All their endeavours have resulted in nearly one thousand submissions (966) by more than a hundred publishers and periodicals worldwide fulfilling the promise stated when the prize was founded in 2003: 'To create, by way of a global competition, an international focus for academic publications on Asia so as to increase their visibility worldwide, also beyond academic circles'.<sup>2</sup>

## The Editions

The English Language Edition with which it all started will remain – now with 497 books and 176 dissertations – for some time to

come the biggest in number of submissions. However, other editions have the potential to grow substantially – in particular the Asian language editions, which started out with more submissions than the first English Language Edition. It takes a lot of energy, time and experience before a prize is deeply rooted and starts to blossom. Here I want to single out the Japanese Language Edition because two previous attempts to set it up were foiled. Therefore the ICAS Secretariat has sponsored this first edition and with good result mainly thanks to the endeavours of its Secretary Aysun Uyar Makibayshi of Doshisha University in Kyoto, who managed to get in 38 publications. She had previously served on the Reading Committee of the English Language Edition and she has put her experience to good use. We do not doubt that in view of this unprecedented result many institutes in Japan will jump to become sponsor of the future IBP Japanese Language Editions.

There were two more newcomers. During the ICAS Book Prize Dinner at ICAS 11 in Leiden, we invited Alexey Maslow, Director of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, with an eye on setting up a Russian Language Edition. We planned a meeting in Moscow to forge its Reading Committee in June 2020. The pandemic was an obstacle for this to happen, but nevertheless it turned out well in the end. The other newcomer is the Hong Kong Article Prize. Many times in the past I was asked whether it would not be a good idea not only to include books but also articles in the IBP because, certainly in the social sciences, a lot of the academic output is in articles. Therefore we welcomed the idea of the Society for Hong Kong Studies to have, on an experimental basis, an article prize for Hong Kong studies. With more than a hundred articles submitted it clearly fulfils an existing need for this field of study and gives us an idea of the wide variety of academic periodicals in which our colleagues find a safe haven to contribute their ideas to.

## The Prizes and The Accolades

Once the number of submitted books to a language edition reaches one hundred, two prizes are awarded, one in the Social Sciences and one in the Humanities. This is the case for the English Language Edition and the Dissertations Edition. Furthermore, in view of the large number of submissions we have, since the sixth edition (2013) put Accolades in place to highlight specific aspects of books and dissertations. Although these are primarily awarded in the English Language Edition, other editions also started to award them or come up with their own Accolades. For example, the Chinese Language Edition (which doubled the number of a submissions thanks to the work of its energetic Secretary Cha-Hsuan Liu) has put in place an Accolade for the Best Translation into the Chinese Language, and the Spanish/Portuguese Edition came up with the Outstanding Contribution to the Field of Asian Studies Accolade. It is not only the prize winners who are acknowledged but everyone who is on the longlists or shortlists or receives

an accolade is a rightful winner. Roughly ten percent of all authors thus receive recognition and rightly so because we all know how much it takes to get published.

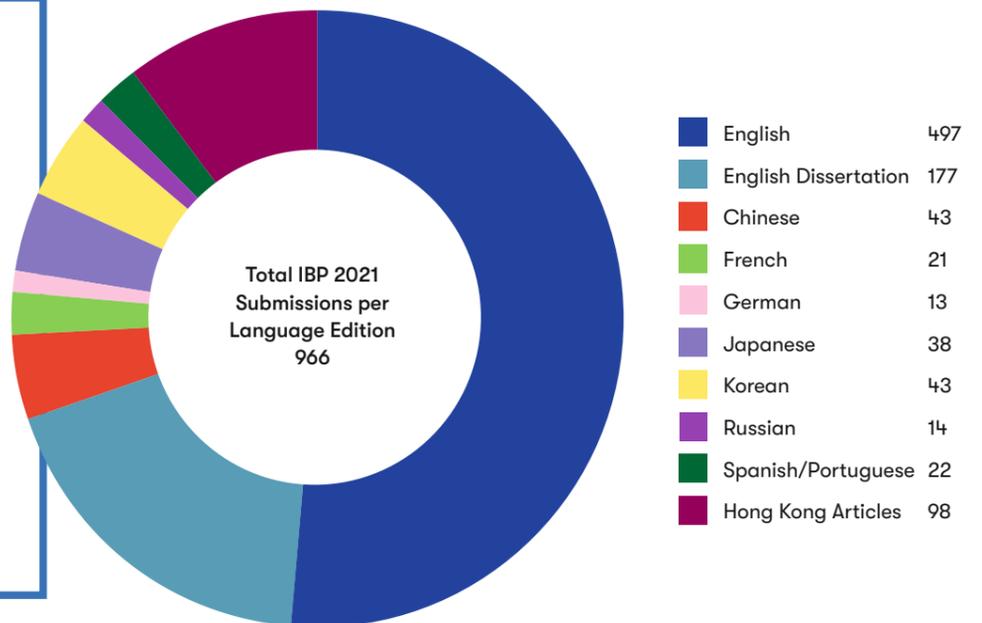
## The Dissertations

ICAS prides itself to be the platform for young scholars and practitioners. Therefore from the first IBP onwards we put a lot of effort into the Dissertations Edition. This time around, there was a record number of 176 dissertations submitted, including 99 in the Humanities and 77 in the Social Sciences. The predominance of Humanities submissions was notable. The two categories were almost equally represented at ICAS 11. At earlier ICASs, Social Science submissions predominated. Those submitting their dissertations came from 101 different universities in 21 countries, with a particularly strong component of American universities represented (33). This is indicative of a cultural difference, with particular merit awards being more commonly endowed by American institutes than those of most other countries, and their students thus being more accustomed to promoting their work in such manner.

As for subjects, dissertations centred on China (41), on India (22), on Indonesia (18) and on Japan (17). But the classic model of a study of one region from within a single discipline is increasingly redundant, with a growing percentage of submissions being cross-disciplinary and/or concerned with cross-regional or cross-cultural issues. Thus entrants include such topics as studies of European millennials' labour migration to Asian metropolises, or Discourses of English and Development at two Bangladesh rural madrasahs. We are curious how these developments compare with dissertations written in other languages. We know there are national dissertations competitions in South Korea and France, for example, and it would be an enrichment if these and also those in other languages are also put on the IBP stage.

## Fusion of Amalgam and Gamelan

Increasingly Asian scholars are and must be at home in different cultures, languages, subjects and disciplines. In an article in 2015, we coined this development the New Asia Scholar, who is increasingly superseding the very specialized disciplinary or regional Asia scholar.<sup>3</sup> One thing is for sure: all those who have been members of the Reading Committees in the past two decades have become by the very nature of their horizon-widening exercise New Asia Scholars. They form the avant-garde in a development which in the near future will lead to a paradigmatic shift in Asian studies with new approaches not only based on Western concepts (amalgam) but will for sure increasingly include Asian concepts (gamelan). The fusion of both will lead to ground-breaking new insights that will transcend traditional institutional structures and methodologies and will turn into constantly changing hypersensitive networks, brain and craft parks, where ideas exchange without any restrictions.



## There is a rapture on the lonely shore

Slowly it is sinking in that this will be my last IBP as General Secretary. I do that with a smile, convinced that my successor Martina van den Haak, who was IBP Acting Secretary from 2008 to 2013, will do so with much gusto. She will work in cooperation with the secretaries of the language editions and with Paramita Paul, who has succeeded Sonja Zweegers (many, many thanks Sonny!) as editor of *The Newsletter* and as Secretary of the IBP English Edition. A special thanks to Alex McKay who has been involved with the IBP almost from its inception and for the past four editions was the Chair of the Dissertation Reading Committee.

Needless to say I would like to thank all IBP Secretaries, Members of the Reading Committees, the authors who in the past have submitted their publications or dissertations, and the publishers who provided the copies of all these wonderful books. It will come as no surprise that I am eagerly looking forward to the tenth edition in 2023!

Paul van der Velde,  
General Secretary, IBP

### Notes

- <https://www.icas.asia/the-newsletter/article/icas-turns-21>
- <https://www.icas.asia/the-newsletter/article/icas-book-prize-multilingual-window-world-asian-studies>
- <https://www.icas.asia/the-newsletter/article/new-asia-scholar>

## IBP 2021 contents

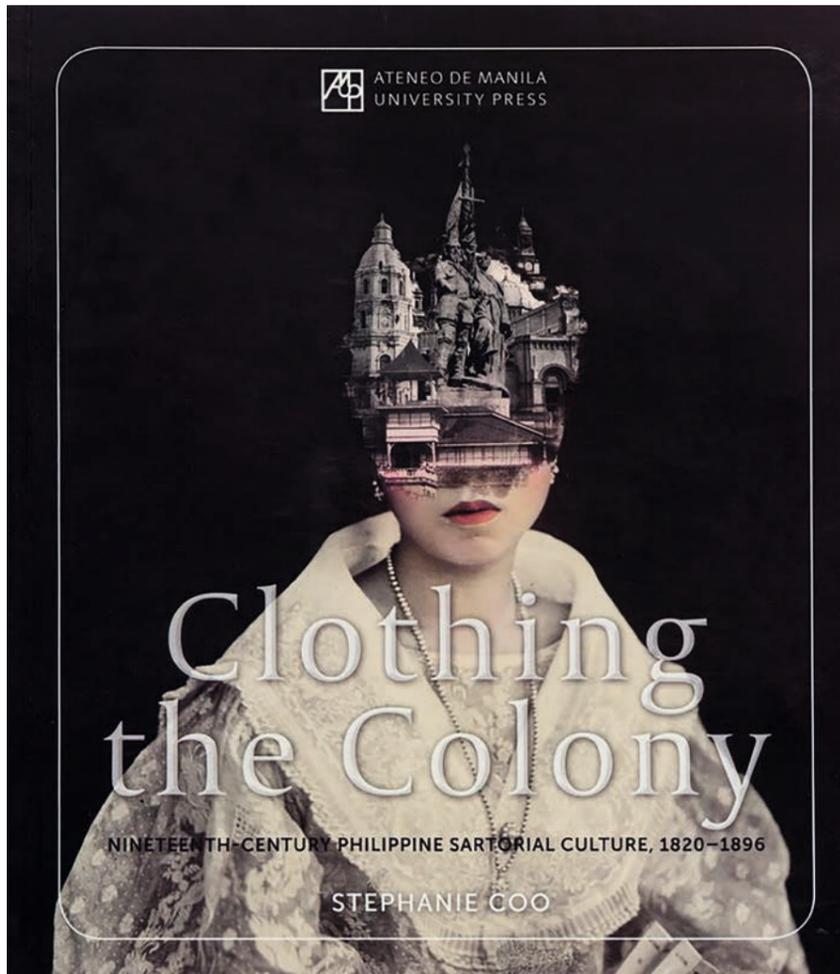
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English Language Edition Social Sciences	12-13
Chinese and French Language Editions	14-15
Spanish/Portuguese Language Edition	16-17
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Korean Language Edition and Hong Kong Article Prize	20

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Leiden

# IBP 2021 English Language Edition – Humanities

**TOTAL SUBMISSIONS****247 Books  
99 Dissertations**

Coordinating Entity: ICAS Secretariat  
General Secretary IBP: Paul van der Velde  
Secretary IBP English Language Edition: Sonja Zweegers  
Chair of 2021 Dissertations Edition: Alex McKay  
Reading Committee Members: Howard Chiang  
and Torsten Weber (books); Faizah Zakaria and  
Anna Romanowicz (dissertations)  
Sponsor of the IBP 2021 English Language Edition:  
Asian Library / Leiden University

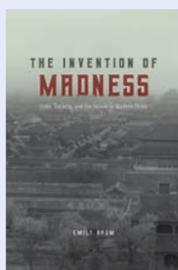
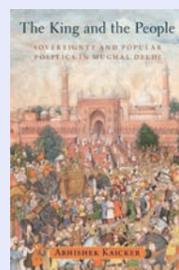
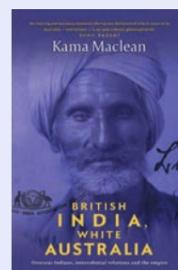


## IBP 2021 Humanities Winner

**AUTHOR****Stephanie Coe****TITLE*****Clothing the Colony. Nineteenth Century Philippine  
Satirical Culture, 1820-1896*****PUBLISHER****Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2019**

Stephanie Coe's *Clothing the Colony* is a beautiful book that studies the role of clothing in the relationship between the Spanish colonizers and the Philippine colonized. It is a comprehensive study that includes all agents and aspects in this process, including children, workers, traders, race, class, gender, religion, economy. It is, most of all, a sociocultural history of clothing in the 19th century but it is also a history of the Philippines and of colonial life. Coe skilfully manages to explain how and why *Clothing the Colony* in the Philippines was different from other colonial experiences, including Indian and Chinese clothing culture and trade. She locates the broad themes she covers in theoretical reflections, including that of "clothing as a social skin", and thereby provides insights that by far transcend the Philippine experience and the 19th century.

## IBP 2021 Humanities Shortlist

**AUTHOR****Emily Baum****TITLE*****The Invention of  
Madness: State, Society,  
and the Insane in Modern  
China*****PUBLISHER****The University of Chicago  
Press, 2018.****AUTHOR****Abhishek Kaicker****TITLE*****The King and the People:  
Sovereignty and Popular  
Politics in Mughal Delhi*****PUBLISHER****Oxford University Press,  
2020.****AUTHOR****Kama Maclean****TITLE*****British India, White  
Australia: Overseas  
Indians, Intercolonial  
Relations and the Empire*****PUBLISHER****NewSouth Publishing,  
2020.****AUTHOR****Benjamin Uchiyama****TITLE*****Japan's Carnival War:  
Mass Culture on the  
Home Front, 1937-1945*****PUBLISHER****Cambridge University  
Press, 2020.**

Emily Baum's *The Invention of Madness* is a tour-de-force history of Western psychiatry in early twentieth-century China. Drawing on a rich and original source base, the book carefully delineates a number of transformations in mental health care between 1908, the year Beijing erected its first insane asylum, and 1937, when the Japanese invaded the city: the Beijing Municipal Asylum's detachment from the police force and reconfiguration under the aegis of Peking Union Medical College, Chinese families' evolving strategies for managing their mentally ill relatives, the rise of a patent medicine industry that targeted the brain and nervous systems, the emergence of a neurasthenic identity embodied by the urban intelligentsia, and the growth of a mental hygiene movement. An important contribution to medical pluralism, this gripping monograph shows how insanity served as the mirror reflection of those who sought a rational existence in the social and political turmoil of Republican China.

Abhishek Kaicker's *The King and the People* is a remarkable study of how the masses of the urban Mughal imperium expressed their political agency through the language of Islamic practices. By mining a diverse range of Persianate sources, it transcends normative binary constructs in historiography, such as the oppositions between politics and religion, the sacred and the secular, elite hegemony and popular sovereignty, and economic rationality and cultural aspiration. This masterful urban history confirms the centrality of Delhi in early modern global history, especially as viewed through the lens of the city's denizens who mobilized, challenged, but also defended the king's authority in ordinary struggles. Along the way, the book rereads several historic episodes – including the 1729 Shoemakers' Riots and Nadir Shah's invasion of Delhi in 1739 – to restore the wide variety of gestures that marked the transgressive assertion of the lowest members of society in determinant political affairs.

Kama Maclean's *British India, White Australia* provides a unique and fascinating perspective on the interrelation between the British empire, Australia and India – or, in her words "the awkward triangular dynamic" between Britain, India and Australia in the early twentieth century. It takes a people-centred approach to explore and explain the complex history of Australia's place in the negotiation of identity and independence from the late 19th to the mid-20th century. Focusing on racial issues, the author manages to write a history of Australia that goes far beyond a political history: it is a global, imperial, and people's history and it also helps to understand today's problems related to Whiteness, imperial nostalgia, and colonial-imperial relationship. The book is also a wonderful example of how Asian history can and maybe should be written in a way that integrates the relevance of non-Asian countries, empires, and people without decentering Asia.

Benjamin Uchiyama's *Japan's Carnival War* is a fascinating cultural history that changes the way we have come to understand Japan's home front during World War Two. Through the lens of five protagonists, we gain new insights into Japan's total war and learn that entertainment and consumption played an important role in mobilizing the people. The reporter, the munitions worker, the soldier, the movie star, and the youth aviator each disrupted the apparatus of wartime state repression and created new visions of pleasure and desire that connected Japanese consumer-subjects to trans-national trends of hedonism. Offering refreshing insights concerning power, identity, and the public mediation of wartime meanings, Uchiyama's book impresses with its creativity and its engagement with both scholarship and historical sources.

## IBP 2021 Accolades in the Humanities

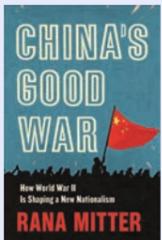
### Publisher's Accolade for Outstanding Production Value



**AUTHOR** Melanie Eastburn (ed.)  
**TITLE** *Japan Supernatural: Ghosts, Goblins and Monsters, 1700s to Now*  
**PUBLISHER** Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2019

*Japan Supernatural* is a richly illustrated exhibition book which impresses by the combination of accessible texts and fascinating paintings, prints, and photographs from three centuries of Japanese yokai culture. It is an outstanding production for both specialists and a broader audience interested in Japanese art.

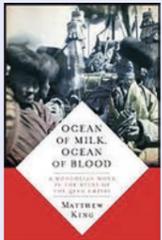
### Most Accessible and Captivating Work for the Non-Specialist Reader Accolade



**AUTHOR** Rana Mitter  
**TITLE** *China's Good War: How World War II is Shaping a New Nationalism*  
**PUBLISHER** Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020

*China's Good War* is a highly readable reassessment of World War II and its significance in the production of historical and cultural narratives about modern China, nationalism, and public memory.

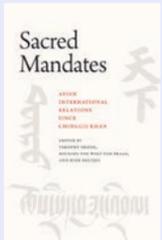
### Specialist Publication Accolade



**AUTHOR** Matthew W. King  
**TITLE** *Ocean of Milk, Ocean of Blood: A Mongolian Monk in the Ruins of the Qing Empire*  
**PUBLISHER** Columbia University Press, 2019

Exploring the intellectual legacy of the Mongolian monk Zava Damdin, *Ocean of Milk, Ocean of Blood* is an erudite study of an alternative historical universe grounded not in conventional categories of imperialism, revolution, and nationalism, but in the role of Buddhist monasticism in exceeding modernity's anticipation at the frontiers of political power.

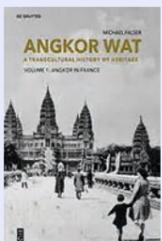
### Teaching Tool Accolade



**AUTHOR** Timothy Brook, Michael van Walt, Miek Boltjes (eds)  
**TITLE** *Sacred Mandates: Asian International Relations since Chinggis Khan*  
**PUBLISHER** The University of Chicago Press, 2018

*Sacred Mandates* offers a new framework for our understanding of the impact and legacies of the history of international relations in Inner and East Asia. Its breadth and accessibility make the book an outstanding addition to any international relations course syllabus.

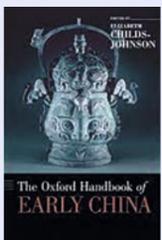
### Ground-Breaking Subject Matter Accolade



**AUTHOR** Michael Falser  
**TITLE** *Angkor Wat: A Transcultural History of Heritage (2 vols.)*  
**PUBLISHER** De Gruyter, 2019

*Angkor Wat* is a multi-volume study of the modern history of this 12th-century temple complex from a transcultural and heritage-making perspective. This monumental study traces the transformation of Angkor Wat's status from a site of French colonial heritage to a global symbol of Cambodian nationalism.

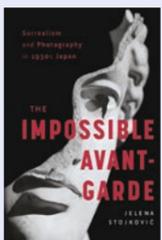
### Edited Volume Accolade



**AUTHOR** Elizabeth Childs-Johnson (ed.)  
**TITLE** *The Oxford Handbook of Early China*  
**PUBLISHER** Oxford University Press, 2020

Authoritative and multidisciplinary in scope, this landmark volume offers a comprehensive overview of the latest research trends, paradigms, and approaches in the study of early China, from the Neolithic era to the Warring States period.

### Best Art Publication



**AUTHOR** Jelena Stojkovic  
**TITLE** *Surrealism and Photography in 1930s Japan: The Impossible Avant-Garde*  
**PUBLISHER** Routledge / Taylor & Francis

Studying the surrealist inspiration to photography in Japan in the 1930s, Jelena Stojkovic's excellently researched book adds a new perspective not only to the history of photography but also to Japanese history. Offering original analyses and reproductions of more than 50 art works and clippings from newspapers and journals, this volume is an outstanding art publication.

## Dissertation Prize 2021 English Edition – Humanities Winner

**AUTHOR** Hyeok Heong Kang

**TITLE** *Crafting Knowledge: Artisan, Officer and the Culture of Making in Choson Korea, 1392-1910*

HARVARD UNIVERSITY, 2020

This work examines craft knowledge as a site for knowledge-making, particularly in science and technology. It argues that before the factory, manufactories taught craft by replicating goods; traces how artisan knowledge rippled out; and follows the creation and life of military objects made by artisans, showing the connections between rote learning and creativity, science and artisanship through the lens of vernacular science.

### IBP 2021 Dissertations in the Humanities Shortlist

**AUTHOR** Kathleen Cruz Gutierrez  
**TITLE** *The Region of Imperial Strategy: Regino Garcia, Sebastian Vidal, Mary Clemens and the Consolidation of International Botany in the Philippines*  
 UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA-BERKELEY, 2020

This dissertation traces the history of botany in the Philippines under two successive colonial regimes. Interrogating how Spain and the US asserted imperial dominance on a global stage, it shows that "scientific regionalism" preceded the political regionalism of World War 2 and that far from being apolitical, botany consolidated empires, and mapped a floristic region before a geo-military Southeast Asia.

**AUTHOR** Matthew Reeder  
**TITLE** *Categorical Kingdoms: Innovations in Ethnic Labeling and Visions of Communal States in Early Modern Siam*  
 CORNELL UNIVERSITY, 2019

Using a variety of previously unstudied primary sources, Reeder uncovers early modern Thai innovations on how to categorize people, and investigates how these categories became the part of the basis for modern ethnicization, priming them to understand Western categories of "nation", "ethnicity" and "race". In so doing, it complicates the notion of personal rule in Southeast Asia's imperialistic monarchies in the early modern period.

**AUTHOR** Young Il Seo  
**TITLE** *Constructing Frontier Villages: Human Habitation in the South Korean Borderlands after the Korean War*  
 UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, 2019

This dissertation examines the villages at the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea, which proves fertile ground to rethink concepts of borderlands in the context of military conflict. Arguing that the DMZ was not a static, regulated space of neutrality, this work, through close attention to architecture and spatiality, demonstrates dynamism on multiple fronts, especially in the transformation of space.

**AUTHOR** Sudev J. Sheth  
**TITLE** *Business Households, Financial Capital, and Public Authority in India, 1650-1818*  
 UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, 2018

This dissertation sheds light on Mughal histories using vernacular sources in Persian, Gujarati, Marathi and Sanskrit to write against the conventional narrative of Mughal decline in the long eighteenth century. It persuasively demonstrates the rise of a finance sector led by "business households," on whom the Mughal court became reliant to its detriment, counter-intuitively presenting economic vitality amidst growing central political weakness.

### IBP 2021 Accolades for Dissertations in the Humanities

#### Chairman's Accolade

**AUTHOR** J. Eva Meharry  
**TITLE** *Politics of the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism and Diplomacy in Afghanistan (1919-2001)*  
 UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, 2020

This dissertation examines the historical relationship between archaeology and nationalism in Afghanistan's political sphere. It demonstrates how nationalist agendas shaped archaeology there, and how archaeology informed elite Afghan nationalist agendas. It is an important record and analysis of the archaeological discipline and its impact on modern Afghanistan.

#### Specialist Accolade

**AUTHOR** Andrea Lorene Gutierrez  
**TITLE** *A Genre of its Own: A History of Pākaśāstra and Other Culinary Writing of Early India*  
 UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN, 2020

This dissertation delineates the history of recipe writing in South Asia through traditional treatises on cooking. It disentangles Pākaśāstra from medical traditions, offers a brilliant technical analysis of these works and expands our understanding of courtly cultures in culinary development.

#### Ground-Breaking Subject Matter Accolade

**AUTHOR** Astrid Moller Olsen  
**TITLE** *Seven Senses of the City: Urban Spacetime and Sensory Memory in Contemporary Sinophone Fiction*  
 LUND UNIVERSITY, 2020

This dissertation investigates the narrative mechanisms and imagery that Sinophone fiction uses to narrate complex human experiences that were rooted in space, time and memory. It breaks new ground in engaging with sensory paradigms to show how this fiction creates civic histories.

#### Most Accessible and Captivating Dissertation for the Non-Specialist Reader Accolade

**AUTHOR** Jack Neubauer  
**TITLE** *Adopted by the World: China and the Rise of Global Intimacy*  
 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, 2019

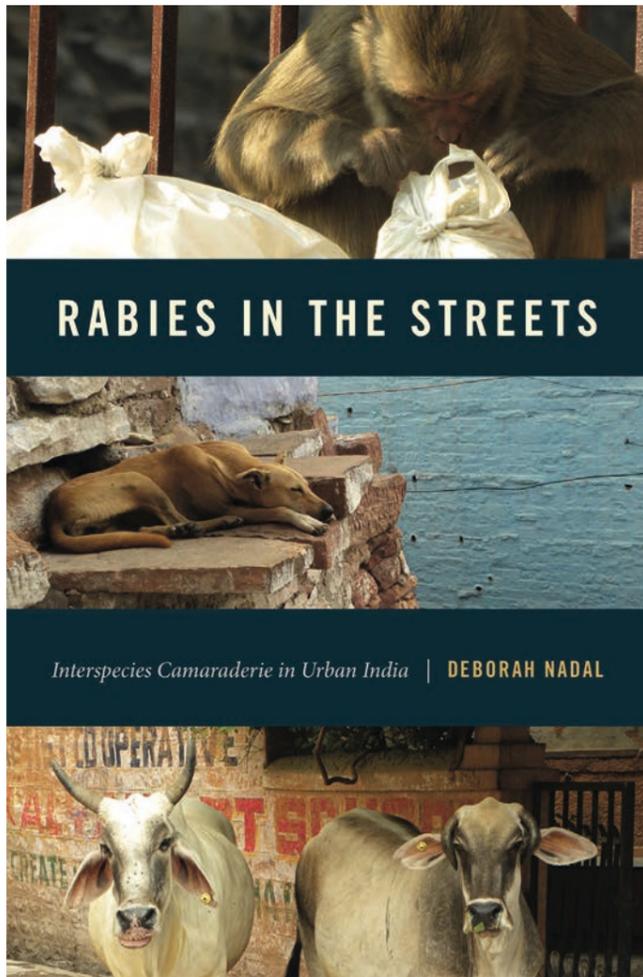
Neubauer examines the "intimate turn" in global humanitarianism and China's role in this development. Through an engaging narrative centred on "transnational adoptions" of Chinese children, it reveals the material and affective exchanges that went into building personal relationships in an international context.

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# IBP 2021 English Language Edition – Social Sciences

**TOTAL SUBMISSIONS****250 Books  
77 Dissertations**

Coordinating Entity: ICAS Secretariat  
General Secretary IBP: Paul van der Velde  
Secretary IBP English Language Edition: Sonja Zweegers  
Chair of 2021 Dissertations Edition: Alex McKay  
Reading Committee Members: Carola Erika Lorea  
and Elena Burgos Martinez (books); Leksia Lee and  
Carmel Christy (dissertations)  
Sponsor of the IBP 2021 English Language Edition:  
Asian Library / Leiden University

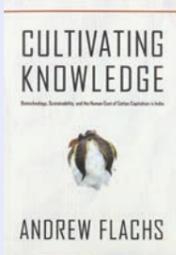


## IBP 2021 Social Sciences Winner

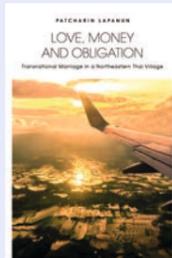
**AUTHOR****Deborah Nadal****TITLE*****Rabies in the Streets: Interspecies Camaraderie  
in Urban India*****PUBLISHER****Penn State University Press, 2020**

This powerful book is the result of participative, multispecies, and multisited ethnography. Following cows, vaccinating dogs, interviewing slum children, Nadal presents heart-breaking stories and a compelling study of a zoonotic disease. This eye-opening book on the implications of rabies, its financial and human costs, and the social and cultural reasons that make it a deadly and neglected disease, is particularly illuminating at a time when humanity is grappling with the Covid pandemic and inoculation campaigns. Through an excellent anthropology of zoonosis from an interspecies perspective, Nadal argues for a One World One Health concept that centres the entanglement of human, nonhuman, animals and environment as co-participants for fostering mutual well-being.

## IBP 2021 Social Sciences Shortlist

**AUTHOR****Andrew Flachs****TITLE*****Cultivating Knowledge:  
Biotechnology,  
Sustainability, and the  
Human Cost of Cotton  
Capitalism in India*****PUBLISHER****University of Arizona  
Press, 2019**

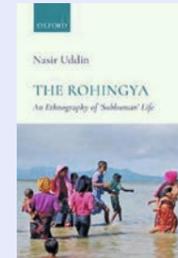
In view of the recent neoliberal changes in Indian agriculture, provoking debate and mass protests, Andrew Flachs offers us a timely, relevant and well-written book on cotton through the lens of farmers' every-day life and choices. Flachs studied big issues like farmers suicide, sustainability, and cotton capitalism through a nuanced ethnography of small things, like seeds, their circulation in local markets, and the decisions that motivate farmers to grow hybrid, genetically modified, or organic crops. This remarkable book employs the case of Andhra Telangana cotton farmers to ask how biotechnology and alternative agriculture create possibilities for sustainable rural well-being in the developing world.

**AUTHOR****Patcharin Lapanun****TITLE*****Love, Money and  
Obligation: Transnational  
Marriage in a Northeastern  
Thai Village*****PUBLISHER****National University of  
Singapore Press, 2019.**

Following the lives, the journeys and the aspirations of Thai women married to European men (*mia farang*) and their families in north-east Thailand, this book offers a real contribution to studies on intimacy, migration, and transnational marriage. Deconstructing stereotypes that position economic benefit, sex work, and marriage in different categories, Lapanun offers a nuanced understanding of both white men and Thai women's mutual expectations, gender roles and agency in the context of transnational marriage, while also integrating the perspectives of village and family members. Written in a clear, concise, and accessible language, this book is a remarkable anthropology of cosmopolitan relationships through Asian grammars of women's agency.

**AUTHOR****Sudipta Sen****TITLE*****Ganges: The Many Pasts  
of an Indian River*****PUBLISHER****Yale University Press, 2019**

Sudipta Sen's book guides the reader through an epic journey: a seamlessly interwoven history of the river Ganges that includes mythology, ecology, literary pasts and lived relationships of people, waters, and meanings. Beautifully written, it employs a vastness of sources collected and analysed over decades of patient, passionate and meticulous scholarship. Sudipta Sen's book places the Ganges at the centre as a subject and maker of history in its own right, elegantly bringing together various streams of inquiry on the most pure and most polluted of all rivers, the amphibious deity that bridges between water and earth, and between people and gods.

**AUTHOR****Nasir Uddin****TITLE*****The Rohingya:  
An Ethnography  
of 'Subhuman' Life*****PUBLISHER****Oxford University Press,  
2020.**

Through a deeply embodied and empathetic ethnography, Nasir Uddin guides us in an immersion of powerful biographies and heart-breaking stories of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, which he employs to formulate his conceptual framework of 'subhuman life'. Rooted in commitment and dedication to social justice, dignity and recognition, Nasir Uddin's book has the revolutionary potential to inspire solidarity by changing people's understanding and attitude towards Rohingya refugees. Besides helping visibilise the struggles of displaced people, this study also includes many interviews with the local Bengalis, to offer us the perceptions of the 'hosts'. Through his critical analysis, we learn that we should look beyond notions of statelessness as culprit for the refugees' lives of uncertainty and discrimination and that there are deeper implications in the process of (host and home) state formation itself.

## IBP 2021 Accolades in the Social Sciences

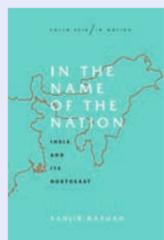
### Publisher's Accolade for Outstanding Production Value



**AUTHOR** Florian Schneider  
**TITLE** *Staging China: The Politics of Mass Spectacle*  
**PUBLISHER** Leiden University Press, 2019

In his timely sociology of mega-events in China, Schneider empirically engages with the fine detail of the networks behind mass-spectacles in China. He coherently focuses on the relevance of networks and brings a variety of actors to the forefront scrutinizing the complex political and performative power of interactions and communication behind China's mass-spectacles.

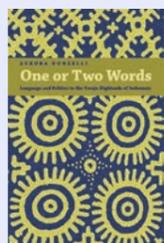
### Most Accessible and Captivating Work for the Non-Specialist Reader Accolade



**AUTHOR** Julia Martínez, Claire Lowrie, Frances Steel, Victoria Haskins  
**TITLE** *Colonialism and Male Domestic Service across the Asia Pacific*  
**PUBLISHER** Bloomsbury Academic

This clearly articulated and accessible book travels across archipelagoes to examine 'trans-colonial' male domestic labour. The authors demonstrate the active role of male domesticity in shaping cultures of racialised servitude through a variety of everyday interconnected spaces, highlighting the importance of the intimate as central element in the construction of transnational power.

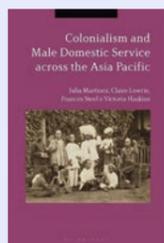
### Specialist Publication Accolade



**AUTHOR** Aurora Donzelli  
**TITLE** *One or Two Words: Language and Politics in the Toraja Highlands of Indonesia*  
**PUBLISHER** NUS Press

Donzelli's ethnographic account of cosmopolitan indigeneity in the Toraja Highlands, offers an innovative account of the recalibration of power between local and national languages in post-Suharto's Indonesia. Her nuanced monograph is a product of long-term critical fieldwork, exploring social change and collective belonging through the power of transient acts of speech.

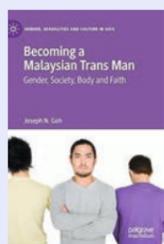
### Teaching Tool Accolade



**AUTHOR** Sanjib Baruah  
**TITLE** *In the Name of the Nation: India and its Northeast*  
**PUBLISHER** Stanford University Press

Controversies around new Indian laws on citizenship for migrants and refugees from neighbouring countries are embedded in the complicated colonial and post-/neo-colonial history of the Northeast region. In this relevant book, Baruah successfully 'translates' this complex political history of ethnic, religious and linguistic identity conflicts in accessible terms for non-specialists.

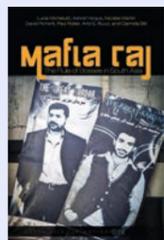
### Ground-Breaking Subject Matter Accolade



**AUTHOR** Joseph N. Goh  
**TITLE** *Becoming a Malaysian Trans Man: Gender, Society, Body and Faith*  
**PUBLISHER** Palgrave Macmillan/Springer

A nuanced monograph about transgender identity as collectively negotiated and embodied. Goh's chapters bring us into the fine grain of the everyday of Malaysian transgender men, navigating religious and secular narratives. In this excellent account, Goh takes the time to coherently articulate the constitutive elements of the struggle to belong beyond medical transitioning as becoming, and down to state failure.

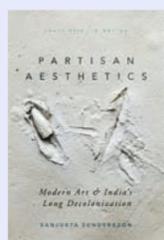
### Edited Volume / Co-Authored Monograph Accolade



**AUTHOR** Lucia Michelutti, Ashraf Hoque, Nicolas Martin, David Picherit, Paul Rollier, Arild E. Ruud, Clarinda Still  
**TITLE** *Mafia Raj: The Rule of Bosses in South Asia*  
**PUBLISHER** Stanford University Press

Collaborative, multivocal and organic, this book offers an accessible and comprehensive anthropology of gangster politicians and violent entrepreneurs in South Asia. It elucidates muscular politics and everyday criminality with analytical depth and ethnographic detail through portraits of charismatic anti-heroes with blurred identities, encompassing boss, delinquent and movie star.

### Best Art Publication



**AUTHOR** Sanjukta Sunderason  
**TITLE** *Partisan Aesthetics: Modern Art and India's Long Decolonization*  
**PUBLISHER** Stanford University Press

This beautifully written study of politically engaged visual artists explores a fascinating phase of the history of arts and politics in Calcutta, informing the local while resonating transnationally. A groundbreaking call to take aesthetic sensibilities seriously and consider art as archive of late colonial and post-colonial histories.

## Dissertation Prize 2021 English Edition – Social Sciences Winner

**AUTHOR** Alyssa Dawn Esquivel Paredes

**TITLE** *Plantation Peripheries: The Multiple Makings of Asia's Banana Republic*

**YALE UNIVERSITY, 2020**

“Plantation Peripheries” is a gripping journey of the banana from the field in Philippines to the markets in Japan. It argues that any given commodity be treated as fundamentally multiple and shape-shifting despite the market logic of singularity attached to them. It is a rigorous exposition of the shortcomings of the commodity chain's production calculus and signposts the need for local actors to be reinserted into the market frame.

### IBP 2021 Dissertations in the Social Sciences Shortlist

**AUTHOR** Chao-yo Cheng  
**TITLE** *Autonomy in Autocracy: Explaining Ethnic Policies in Post-1949 China*  
**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA-LOS ANGELES, 2019**

This dissertation brings together machine learning with fascinating expert interviews to investigate the underlying motivations for China to designate autonomous ethnic regions. Finding that questions of power consolidation and center-periphery arrangements are more decisive than demands by ethnic minorities, it deepens understandings of Chinese ethnic policy and suggests new directions for the study of ethnic management and authoritarianism beyond China.

**AUTHOR** Guillaume Dandurand  
**TITLE** *The Techno-Politics of Food Security in New Delhi: The Re-Materialization of the Ration Card*  
**YORK UNIVERSITY, 2018**

This is a well-researched dissertation, which is theoretically articulated at the intersection of governmentality and an anthropological reading of science and technology studies literature. It explores the gaps in the technical implementation of the National Food Security Act, through a rich ethnography of the bureaucratic labyrinths of the ration card system in different urban contexts of India.

**AUTHOR** Jiashi Fengjiang  
**TITLE** *Grassroots Philanthropy in China: Work, Ethics, and Social Change*  
**LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE, 2019**

This dissertation relates poignant ethnographic stories of men who engage in volunteerism as a form of gendered, ethical self-making in a time of professional precarity in China. The dissertation is original in providing a window into China's ongoing seismic shifts in economics and employment through people's unpaid labor and ethical engagements.

**AUTHOR** Huê-Tâm Jamme  
**TITLE** *Productive Frictions and Urbanism in Transition: Planning Lessons from Traffic Flows and Urban Street Life in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*  
**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, 2020**

This work proposes an innovative way of understanding the urbanism of street life as the result of a “productive friction” between traffic flows and the built environment. Combining ethnographic fieldwork with multivariate analyses of a transportation survey, it brings out the implications of car-based frictionless mobility on the urban poor in Ho Chi Minh City, and recommends friction planning to ensure inclusive urban spaces.

### IBP 2021 Accolades for Dissertations in the Social Sciences

#### Chairman's Accolade

**AUTHOR** Karolina Kluczevska  
**TITLE** *Development aid in Tajikistan: Six global paradigms and practice on the ground*  
**UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS, 2018**

This thesis offers a critical examination of development aid in Tajikistan. It analyses the motives and trajectories of global paradigms promoted by Western donors, and the local NGO and government actors' perspectives on donors' interventions and their practices of re-appropriation of the paradigms.

#### Specialist Accolade

**AUTHOR** Devika Mittal  
**TITLE** *'Secular' School Culture: A Study of a Government Aided School in Delhi*  
**UNIVERSITY OF DELHI, 2019**

This dissertation is an extensive ethnography of the meaning of secularism in the everyday life of a school in New Delhi. Nuanced and well-written, it unravels the multiple and complex layers of the theory and practice of secularism without falling into the received notions of the concept.

#### Ground-Breaking Subject Matter Accolade

**AUTHOR** Ranjana Raghunathan  
**TITLE** *Inhabiting Intimate Worlds: Tamil Women and Belonging in Singapore*  
**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE, 2020**

This dissertation is a thoughtful reading of the intricacies of the intimate life of Tamil women in Singapore and offers a nuanced rethinking of the category of belonging, beyond, but also related to, identity, citizenship and place.

#### Most Accessible and Captivating Dissertation for the Non-Specialist Reader Accolade

**AUTHOR** Anna Maria Iskra  
**TITLE** *Healing the Nation through Self-Discovery: The Chinese New Age Milieu and the Politics of Emotion*  
**UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG, 2020.**

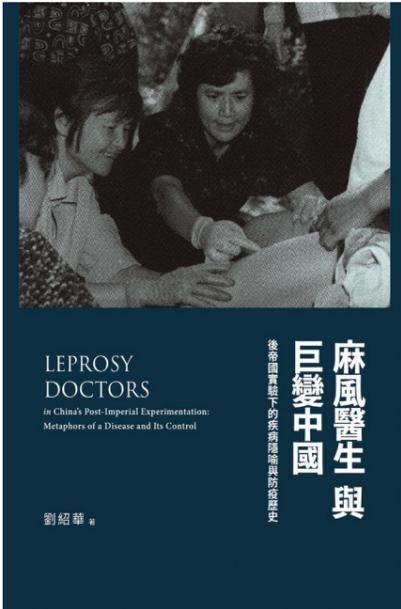
This work presents vivid ethnographic descriptions of New Age workshops and individuals' journeys of self-making in China today. Based on extensive in-depth research, it directs attention to how emotional excess subverts and distorts state projects with often unpredictable effects.

# IBP 2021 Chinese Language Edition

TOTAL SUBMISSIONS

43 Books

Organizing Institute: National Chengchi University  
Secretary: Hong-Yi Lien  
Acting Secretary: Cha-Hsuan Liu  
Reading Committee Members: Asami Yoji and  
Táňa Dluhošová (humanities); Hong-Yi Lien and  
Cha-Hsuan Liu (social sciences)  
Sponsor of the IBP 2021 Chinese Language Edition:  
National Chengchi University



## IBP 2021 Chinese Language Winner

AUTHOR

Shao-Hua Liu 劉紹華

TITLE

*Leprosy Doctors in China's Post-Imperial Experimentation: Metaphors of a Disease and Its Control*

麻風醫生與巨變中國：後帝國實驗下的疾病隱喻與防疫歷史

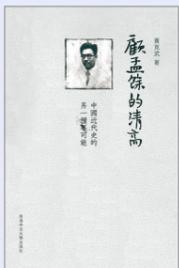
PUBLISHER

Acropolis, an imprint of Walkers Cultural Enterprises, Ltd.  
衛城出版/遠足文化事業股份有限公司

To content the heavily stigmatised epidemic of Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) in China, People's Republic of China (PRC) took the approach of "coercive humanitarianism", a leprosy isolation policy that has urged the establishment of leprosy villages from the 1950s onwards. Liu Shaohua investigates the work of leprosy doctors in the time and space as an attempt to establish a post-imperial and socialist hygienic modernity, with special attention to the stigma attached to both lepers and healthcare professionals, and likewise suffered. It is a study of medical anthropology, a history of public health, a research of social policy, but also the concern and care for the disadvantaged groups. With sincerity and

a rigorous attitude, Liu expounds the intricate relationship between diseases, individual groups, policies, and political systems. Under the two axes of time and topic, the book discusses the biopolitical power represented in public health and epidemic prevention, as well as the personal and collective destiny under this power. Today our world is under the public health emergency of COVID pandemic, the global political and economic system is experimenting various social controls to content the epidemic for rebuilding a "normal society." The reflection and implication of this book on the collective interests and individual rights and interests are specially inspiring for us to contemplate.

## IBP 2021 Chinese Language Shortlist and Accolades



AUTHOR

Max Ko-wu Huang  
黃克武 著

TITLE

*Above and Apart: Gu Mengyu and His Search for an Alternative Path in Modern Chinese History*  
顧孟餘的清高：中國近代史的另一種可能

PUBLISHER

The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2020.

History is usually the story of the men in the lime-light, not those in the shadows. Huang Kewu, however, proves otherwise. The strength of the book lies in the art of introducing a seemingly lesser and long-forgotten historical figure. By telling the story of Gu Mengyu, a respected voice differed from the mainstream ideology of KMT led by Chiang Kai-shek, Huang takes the reader all the way back to Republican China, shining a light on the political scene, the internal dynamics of the KMT in the late 1920s and 30s, but also on the workings of academia at the time and thus reveals the complex history of Republican China and the position of public intellectuals. By employing an extraordinarily wide range of sources such as contemporaneous newspaper reports in Chinese, English, and Japanese; archival sources both from Taiwan and the US; and ego-documents of Gu's contemporaries, the author paints a rich picture of Republican history both in China and Taiwan.



AUTHOR

Chen Hao (ed. Hu Wenbo)  
陳昊 著 / 胡文波 責編

TITLE

*Medicine as On-going Meanings: The Order of Books, Physicians' Body and the Emergence of Medical Identities in 6-8th Century China*  
身分敘事與知識表述之間的醫者之意—6-8世紀中國的書籍秩序、為醫之體與醫學身分的浮現

PUBLISHER

Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House 上海古籍出版社, 2019.

This book is themed with the history of medicine of the 6th to 8th century. The author is not satisfied with the traditional discourse on factual level but strives to approach the topic from a sophisticated perspective along with multilevel analysis. Throughout all chapters, the following opposite viewpoints were presented. One is the comparison between upper class and lower class, another is between the presentation of entities and abstract image-shaping methods, the other is between the doctors as "individuals" and the "books/texts" that in turn shapes the images of individuals. In most of the chapters, the author puts efforts on the echoes of these basic contexts. On top of this, the author also interweaves knowledge and methodologies of narratology, codicology, grammatology, buddhology and other fields making the book magnificent and forming a picture of a solid and polished ancient medical world.



AUTHOR

Chih-Heng Su  
蘇致亨

TITLE

*Once Upon a Time in Hollywood Taiwan: The Life and Death of Taiwanese Hokkien Cinema*  
毋甘願的電影史：曾經，臺灣有個好萊塢。

PUBLISHER

SpringHill Publishing  
春山出版有限公司, 2020.

This book fills a void in the historiography of Taiwanese cinema by telling the story of one sector of the Taiwanese film industry, reconstructed through intensive archival research and in-depth interviews. The author places Taiwanese-language films center stage that have been neglected for a long time. Not only does the author challenge many of the stereotypes that have informed our understanding of Taiwanese-language movies, but he also sheds a light on how political pressures in the post-war era impacted on local culture and how technical challenges influenced local filmmaking in particular. Not dwelling unduly on theory, the book's witty and reader-friendly style throws light on a revealing aspect of Taiwan's post-war cultural history while broadening its perspective to encompass political and economic transformations throughout East Asia as a whole, while nevertheless avoiding the pitfalls of political determinism. The book's fluent style is both an inspiration and a challenge to the academic publication system.

### Best Book Translation into the Chinese Language Accolade



AUTHOR

Wenkai He  
(trans. Jingling Wang)  
和文凱 著 / 汪精玲 譯

TITLE

*Paths toward the Modern Fiscal State: England, Japan and China*  
通向現代財政國家的路徑：英國、日本和中國

PUBLISHER

The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2020.

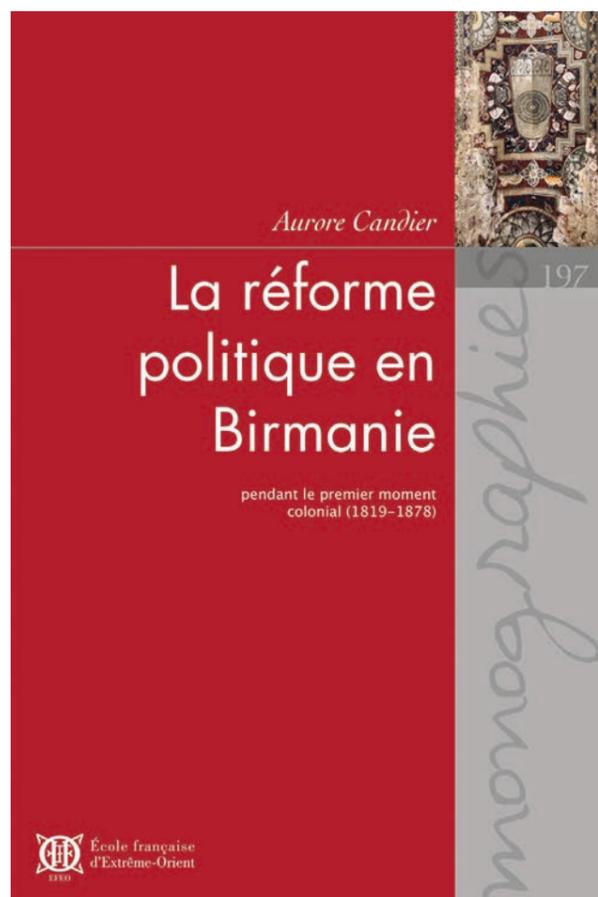
Combining institutionalism, historical analysis, and economics, this book sheds light on the reasons and process of how modern fiscal states form and emerge through comparative historical research. The innovative and persuasive elucidation is impressive and inspiring. Making use of abundant historical data, the author probes into various variables that may lead to the result of whether states would transform to modern fiscal states or not, and then he eliminates variables that cannot give a clear explanation, leaving the critical ones—socio-economic environment and significant historical events. The systematical and deliberate analysis with clear logic makes an accomplishment and offers some insights in this field. With this book, the interaction between economy and politics is shown again, and the importance of path dependence and occurrence of credit crisis are emphasized, which helps us know better about the development and transformation from domain states or traditional fiscal states to modern fiscal states.

# IBP 2021 French Language Edition

## TOTAL SUBMISSIONS

21 Books

Organizing Entity: GIS Asie  
Secretary: Aurélie Varrel  
Acting Secretary: Gosia Chwirot  
Reading Committee Members: Vincent Goossaert and Matthias Hayek (humanities); David Picherit and Louise Pichard-Bertaux (social sciences)  
Sponsor of the IBP 2021 French Language Edition: GIS Asie – French Academic Network on Asian Studies



## IBP 2021 French Language Winner

### AUTHOR

Aurore Candier

### TITLE

*La réforme politique en Birmanie pendant le premier moment colonial (1819-1878)*

Political reform in Burma during the first colonial period (1819-1878)

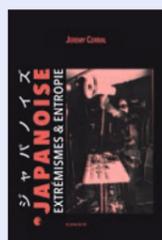
### PUBLISHER

EFEQ, 2020

**E**rudite, extremely well documented and very well written, Aurore Candier's book about Burma in the nineteenth century is a major contribution to the knowledge of South East Asia political history. Perfectly constructed, the text explores this unique moment in the 19th century when part of Burma was still an independent kingdom while the other was annexed by the British Empire. Working with archives and sources in Burmese

and English, the author traces this period not from a Eurocentric point of view, as too often, but by putting into perspective the vernacular and western sources. Shedding light on this period of political transition which will nourish the Burmese conception of political reform, this monograph is an essential source for understanding the current political and societal movements in Burma, but also in the region.

## IBP 2021 French Language Shortlist and Accolades



### AUTHOR

Jérémie Corral

### TITLE

*Japanoise – Extrémismes & entropie / Japanoise – Extrémismes & entropy*

### PUBLISHER

Les presses du reel, 2019

Corral's book aims to decompartmentalise the study of a musical genre (or non-genre) that was built up in Japan from the 1990s onwards: Japanese noise music, or 'Japanoise'. This genre is a continuation of the explorations that began in the West and in Japan in the 1960s and 1970s, which sought a form of rupture, sometimes violent, with the 'commercial' or 'mainstream' musical genres. Characterised by different forms of extremism and ostensibly subversive, the Japanese phenomenon is interesting because of the contradictions at the heart of its creation, between a desire to break with the existing local scene and the affirmation of an autonomy from Western styles, a vision that is in turn nurtured by the international representations and expectations of Japanese anti-culture. The volume comes out in a quasi coffee table book format with many pictures, in a welcome effort to bring it to a large audience.



### AUTHOR

Gwennaël Gaffric

### TITLE

*La Littérature à l'ère de l'Anthropocène, Une étude écocritique autour des œuvres de l'écrivain taiwanais Wu Ming-yi*  
/ Literature in the Anthropocene Era, an ecocritical study of the works of the Taiwanese writer Wu Ming-yi

### PUBLISHER

Asiatheque, 2019

Gwennaël Gaffric signs a fascinating work which describes the link between ecology and literature based on the work of Taiwanese writer Wu Ming Yi. Organized around six main themes – natures, waters, terroirs, species, catastrophes and ecotopias – the study is based on the theories of ecocriticism and on a deep knowledge of Taiwanese language and literature. The book is serious, well documented and provides a very good bibliography. The choice of having the translated version and the original version appear for each quotation is quite relevant since it allows Chinese-speaking readers to read at two levels. Beyond the importance of this book to enhance our knowledge of Taiwanese literature, this monograph on an author engaged in preservation of nature highlights a facet of the Taiwanese society facing the ecological emergency.

### Publishers's Accolade for Outstanding Production Value



### AUTHOR

Charlotte Marchina

### TITLE

*Nomad's land. Eleveurs, animaux et paysages chez les peuples Mongols / Nomad's Land: Herders, Animals and Landscapes among the Mongols*

### PUBLISHER

Editions Zones Sensibles, 2019

It is a remarkably original and innovative work, published by the Belgian publisher Zones Sensibles. Reworked from Marchina's dissertation, it offers an analysis of the occupation and conception of space by Mongolian herders based on a long-term ethnography and geographical analysis of nomadic routes, through diagrams and precise maps, some of which were made by GPS sensors attached to animals. The book offers all the qualities of a scholarly work but in an accessible format for a larger audience, and it is beautifully illustrated by the author's photographs.

This book is also on the shortlist.

### Most Accessible and Captivating Work for the Non-specialist Reader Accolade



### AUTHOR

Stéphanie Tawa Lama-Rawal

### TITLE

*Les avatars de la participation en Inde. Formes et ambiguïtés de la démocratie participative / Avatars of Participation in India. Forms and Ambiguities of Participatory Democracy*

### PUBLISHER

Editions du Croquant, 2018

While participation is gaining ground in the European public debate as a means of reinvigorating a representative democracy that may run out of steam, it is often seen in India as an instrument of neoliberal governance in the hands of the upper classes seeking to bypass politics. The author draws on this contrast to highlight the debates in India about the forms of participatory democracy since Independence. The author offers a convincing, nuanced and welcome book on participation. Written in a clear and rigorous manner, the volume is of interest to an audience beyond specialists of India, opening a welcome dialogue between European and Indian bodies of literature on participation and democracy.

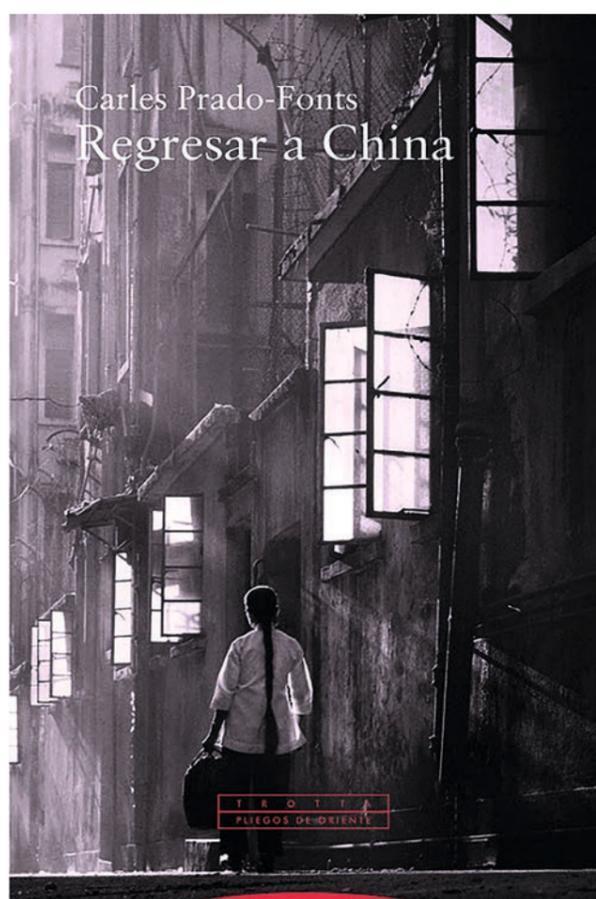
This book is also on the shortlist.

# IBP 2021 Spanish / Portuguese Language Edition

## TOTAL SUBMISSIONS

**22 Books**  
(17 Spanish, 5 Portuguese)

Organizing Institute: SEPHIS  
Secretary: Claudio Pinheiro  
Acting Secretary: Vinicius K. Ferreira  
Reading Committee Members:  
Armando Renato Balderrama (humanities);  
Rosa Maria Perez (social sciences)  
Sponsor of the IBP 2021 Spanish/Portuguese  
Language Edition: The South-South Exchange Program  
for Research on the History of Development (SEPHIS)



## IBP 2021 Spanish Language Winner

### AUTHOR

**Carles Prado-Fonts**

### TITLE

***Regresar a China / Returning to China***

### PUBLISHER

**Editorial Trotta, 2019**

**R**eturning to China is fascinating book, produced by a senior researcher and gifted writer. Carlos Prado-Fonts portrays the experience of the return of Chinese intellectuals who left their country for studying in Europe, the United States and Japan in the first half of the 20th century. Prado-Fonts focuses on the trajectory of three renowned writers, Lu Xun (1881-1936), Lao She (1899-1966) and Qian Zhongshu (1910-1998), to address a much broader social, cultural and political context. This captivating work, endowed with a rich and sensitive narrative, does not avoid confronting clichés about China. The book articulates an analysis of macro processes and individual trajectories, observing the dilemmas of a society in vertiginous transformation of its political system, while observing individual trajectories of thousands of returned intellectuals, divided between different cultures and national experiences.

## IBP 2021 Portuguese Language Winner

### AUTHOR

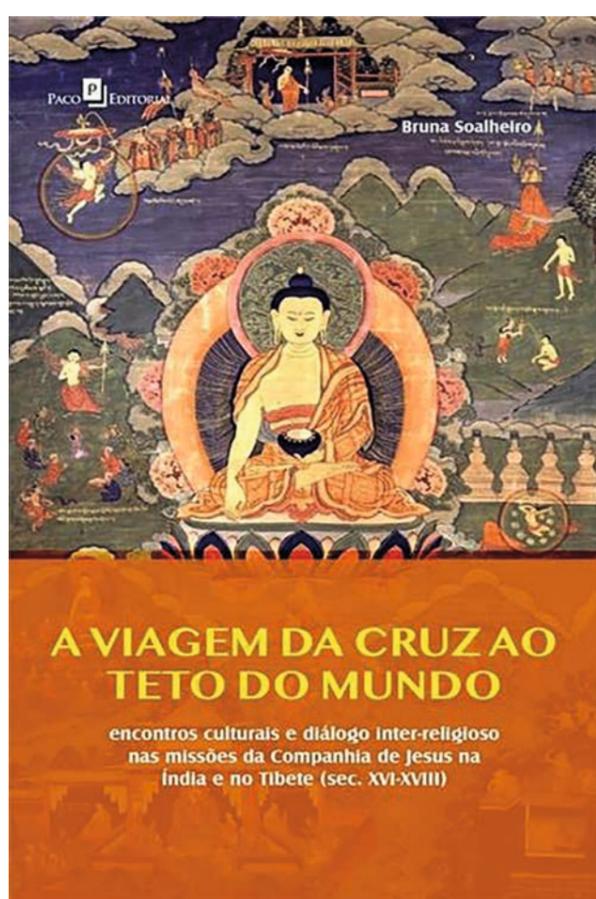
**Bruna Soalheiro**

### TITLE

***Viagem da Cruz ao Teto do Mundo: Encontros culturais e diálogo inter-religioso nas missões da Companhia de Jesus na Índia e no Tibete (séculos XVI a XVIII) / The travels of the Cross to the roof of the world: Cultural Encounters and Interreligious Dialogue in the Missions of the Society of Jesus in India and Tibet (16th-18th centuries)***

### PUBLISHER

**Paco Editorial, 2018**



**T**he product of serious and dedicated research, on the expansion of Christianity in a region with a shortage of academic analysis: the history of the connections between South Asia, the plateau of Asia and Central Asia. Bruna Soalheiro's careful research on the Jesuit presence in India between the 16th and 18th centuries, focuses on the missions to the Mogul court (1579), and that to the Tibet (started in 1624), analyzing writings published and circulated by the Society of Jesus, as well as on letters and notebooks written by missionaries. Soalheiro explores reports on the complex dynamics of cultural transfers, ways of circulating ideas and political disputes that go beyond strictly religious readings and help "de-cloistering" the history of religious orders. The book dialogues with a global, connected history that does not lose sight of the geopolitical dimension of religious missions, which need to be analyzed in the face of disputes with other religions present in the region, such as Buddhism and Islam. Another merit of this work is to show that even if the conversion intentions were not very successful with the Mogul court and in Tibet, the missions certainly left a mark in the political and cultural history of these spaces, ending up generating new fields of possibilities in religious terms and politicians.

## IBP 2021 Spanish/Portuguese Language Shortlist

**AUTHOR**

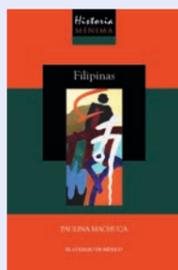
Moisés Garduño García

**TITLE**

*Los combatientes del pueblo de Irán: historia, auge y caída de una oposición islamo-marxista / Iran's People's Combatants: History, Rise and Fall of an Islamo-Marxist Opposition*

**PUBLISHER**

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2019

**AUTHOR**

Paulina Machuca

**TITLE**

*Historia mínima de Filipinas*  
A concise history of the Philippines

**PUBLISHER**

Colmex, 2019

**AUTHOR**

Daniel Sastre de la Vega

**TITLE**

*Arte y Nación. El discurso de la historia del arte en el Japón Meiji / Art and Nation The Discourse of the History of Art in Meiji Japan*

**PUBLISHER**

Edicions Bellaterra, 2019

The scholarship of Portuguese- or Spanish-speaking countries' is not normally considered when we search for as specialists in the Middle East, near Asia or central Asia. This impressive and very detailed study conducted by Moises Garduño shows the accumulated scholarship in Latin America concerning these regions. The investigation deals with archival sources and interviews with politicians, activists and former intellectuals related to the contemporary history of Iran and the engagement of the Iran's People's Fighters (Moyahedin-e Jajq-e Iran) for decades. The scholarship of Portuguese- or Spanish-speaking countries' is not normally considered when we search for as specialists in the Middle East, near Asia or central Asia. This impressive and very detailed study conducted by Moises Garduño shows the accumulated scholarship in Latin America concerning these regions. The investigation deals with archival sources and interviews with politicians, activists and former intellectuals related to the contemporary history of Iran and the engagement of the Iran's People's Fighters (Moyahedin-e Jajq-e Iran) for decades.

Paulina Machuca brings an important contribution to the study of Asia in Spanish language, presenting the Philippines as a space historically marked by the crossing of worlds and the circulation of cultures. In addition to emphasizing the archipelago's connections with other territories in the Indian and Pacific Ocean over five centuries, the book takes an innovative look at the history of relations between the Philippines and Mexico. One of her main contributions is to propose a history of the Philippines that transcends the hegemonic national historiographical narratives essentially centered on the Manila region. Machuca highlights regions marginalized by the official historical narrative, such as the Muslim Mindanao, as well as dedicating itself to the intertwined relations between the islands of the vast Philippine archipelago. The work also stands out for its critical eye in relation to Spanish and American historiographies, which are still dominant, essentially based on colonial archives and reproducing stereotypes inherited from that period.

Daniel Sastre's work concentrates on the role of the State in the construction of aesthetics, and of a consumption of the aesthetics of art in Japan in the second half of the 19th century. Although the connection between art and nation has been extensively explored over the past few decades for the case of Japan, Sastre's work brings fresh innovations to the debate. The book shows that writings on aesthetics and historical-artistic narratives, anticipate the creation of museums, the consolidation of an artistic criticism and the formalization of the field of history of art in a vast geography of the Far East.

## IBP 2021 Accolades

### Publishers Accolade for Outstanding Production Value

**AUTHORS**

Marli Cristina Scmazzon and Jeff Franco (eds.)

**TITLE**

*Primeira Circum-navegação brasileira e Primeira Missão à China / The first Brazilian circumnavigation and the first mission to China*

**PUBLISHER**

Dois por Quatro Editora, 2019

The major relevance of the *Primeira Circum-navegação brasileira* remains on its careful editorial project, valuable for the dissemination of the history of diplomatic relations between Brazil and Asia during the Brazilian imperial period. This richly illustrated publication with iconographic and documentary material from late 19th century, accompanies the celebrations of the 500 years of the first circumnavigation of the planet, which docked at Guanabara Bay in 1519. Scmazzon and Franco follow the journey of the corvette *Vital de Oliveira*, built in Rio de Janeiro especially for this mission. The book restores the history of the first Brazilian circumnavigation, undertaken by the Imperial Navy between 1879 and 1891, addressing the role of this mission in consolidating Brazil's diplomatic relations with African and Asian countries, with an emphasis on relations between Brazil and China.

### Specialist Publication Accolade

**AUTHOR**

Henrique Buarque de Gusmão

**TITLE**

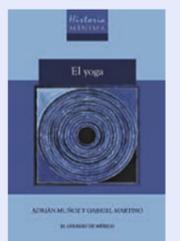
*A arte romanesca do ator: Constantin Stanislavski na cultura do romance / The Actor's Novel Art: Constantin Stanislavski in the Culture of the Novel*

**PUBLISHER**

Hucitec, 2020

This is a robust, careful and innovative book. Certainly one of the best written texts submitted to the ICAS-Sephis prize in 2021. The publication is a contribution to the history of theater and art in general. In order to advance in what he calls a cultural history of theatrical practices, Henrique Gusmão revisits the work of the Russian director Constantin Stanislavski, resuming his contributions to a movement to redefine the work of this actor and the kind of theater he represents, as the son of the modern novel in early 20th century. In addition to the field of theater, Gusmão's erudition allows him to explore the influence of literature in the emergence of new, less conventional relations between the text and the scene. Although the field of studies on Asia in Anglophone, Germanophilic or Francophone contexts does not always include studies on Russia, the committee considered the unique quality of this work and its relevance to the field in Portuguese and Spanish.

### Teaching Tool Accolade

**AUTHORS**

Adrián Muñoz e Gabriel Martino

**TITLE**

*Historia mínima del yoga*  
A concise history of Yoga

**PUBLISHER**

Colmex, 2019

This book provides a historical synthesis of yoga as a cultural, philosophical and political practice. The questions that motivate the book are compelling: what is yoga? A philosophy, a religion, a physical exercise, a lifestyle? More than proposing an answer to these dilemmas, the authors intend to retrace a long and diverse history of yoga, always attentive to its transformations and impacts in different historical and social contexts. Its merit is to offer a holistic but accessible view of yoga, while challenging exotic or proselytizing views of an old practice that has gained global contours and, consequently, new meanings. It is an important reading to introduce readers interested in a complex history, crossed by disputes of meaning, metamorphoses and full of symbolism.

### Edited Volume Accolade

**AUTHOR**

Pau Pitarch Fernández Pau (ed.)

**TITLE**

*Nuevas aproximaciones a la literatura japonesa*  
New approaches on Japanese literature

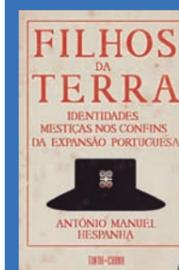
**PUBLISHER**

Edicions Bellaterra, 2019

The book organized by Pau Pitarch reflects the international renewal of the field of studies on modern Japan in the humanities and social sciences. This movement is visible in recent publications in several languages and linguistic-academic communities from English to Korean, through German, Japanese, Chinese and Spanish and Portuguese works. It is important to note that not all recently released publications on modern Japan are nipcentered, but include the reverberations of historical transformations that have taken place elsewhere, with or without immediate reverberation in Japanese life. Pitarch's book amplifies this dimension by presenting a collection of 10 chapters by 11 Spanish-speaking authors who consistently produce on Japanese literature, based from Mexico and the US to Japan itself.

## Honorary Mention

### Outstanding Contribution to the Field of Asian Studies

**AUTHOR**

Amntonio Manuel Hespanha

**TITLE**

*Filhos da Terra. Identidades Mestiças nos Confins da Expansão Portuguesa*  
Mestizo Identities at the Edges of Portuguese (Imperial) Expansion

**PUBLISHER**

Tinta-da-China, 2019

This is the last book by one of the greatest Portuguese intellectuals, before his death. In this work, António Manuel Hespanha (1945-2019) opens up new research agendas, proposes new concepts and renews the historiographical debate about the Portuguese empire, paying special attention to subjects from communities of mixed identities that figure in images that circulate between the 16th and 19th centuries and between places as distant as Guinea, Angola or Macau, constituting a vast empire in territorial and identity terms. Through concepts such as the empire of shadows and the informal empire, the detailed description of these communities on different continents, and the use of dense demographic and socio-cultural data, Hespanha analyzes mechanisms of governance operating in these territories and discusses notions of identity in imperial contexts.

# IBP 2021 Japanese, German and Russian Language Editions



## TOTAL SUBMISSIONS TO THE JAPANESE EDITION

38 Books

Organizing Entity: ICAS Secretariat  
Secretary: Aysun Uyar Makibayashi  
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Kae Amo and Set Jacobowitz  
(humanities); Aysun Uyar Makibayashi  
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Sponsor of the IBP 2021 Japanese  
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Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS)

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Eastern Studies (IFES), Russian Academy of Sciences  
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and Alexey Maslov (social sciences)  
Sponsor of the IBP 2021 Russian Language Edition:  
Institute of Far Eastern Studies (IFES), Russian Academy  
of Sciences

## IBP 2021 Japanese Language Winner

### AUTHOR

Yuka Shimooka 下岡友加

### TITLE

*Japanese Author of Postcolonial Taiwan:  
The Way of Lingzhi Huang / ポストコロニアル  
台湾の日本語作家:黄霊芝の方法*

### PUBLISHER

Keisuisha 溪水社, 2019

Yuka Shimooka's work on Taiwanese author Lingzhi Huang and his prevailing work in Japanese in Taiwan brilliantly combine the way of authorship and postcolonial history in Taiwan. This work is also a convincing example on how one language, Japanese in this case, can present a potential to embrace various worlds and values without belonging to its own nation, nationality, ethnicity or culture. Long-running interview with Lingzhi Huang adds a rather exploratory dimension for the books' overall compilation. Combining the art of being an author in Japanese out of Japan and response of the Taiwanese as well as the Japanese societies to this intercultural and linguistic experience provide a valuable and informing work for the Japanese scholarship.

## IBP 2021 Japanese Language Shortlist



### AUTHOR

Miyoko Taniguchi  
谷口美代子

### TITLE

*Assisting Peacebuilding:  
Mindanao Conflict and  
Road to Peace*  
平和構築を支援するミン  
ダナオ紛争と和平への道

### PUBLISHER

The University of Nagoya  
Press 名古屋大学出版会,  
2020

This book discusses the problems present in Mindanao society from a historical perspective. It offers an alternative peace-building model in line with the local context based on the cases of "peace-building from below" initiated by the local leaders. The author has worked in an international cooperation agency and knows the region well. Patron-client relationships still exist between the elite and the local people. In such cases, she argues, liberal peace-building based on democratisation and the market economy and peace-building conducted by civil society do not work well. She suggests that the influential actors should be identified in such regions and they should be encouraged to go from being masters to being governors or servants.



### AUTHOR

Tran Van Tho & Shunji  
Karikomi トラン・ヴァン・  
トウ、菊込俊二、

### TITLE

*The Middle Income Trap  
from a China and ASEAN  
Perspective*  
中所得国の罟と中国・ASEAN

### PUBLISHER

Keiso Shobo 勁草書房, 2019

This work presents us an in-depth analysis how China and ASEAN countries can go out of the middle-income trap by focusing on various aspects of economic development and possible development trajectories of those countries. By giving thorough analysis of development experiences and potentials in China, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, the authors successfully manage to locate both commonalities and pinpoint each country's specific practice along the way. Skillful utilization of data and a well-composed comparison between economic capacities and practices within each country make this work a valued and significant contribution for the Japanese academic circles.

### AUTHOR

Koutarou Endou  
遠藤耕太郎

### TITLE

*The Origins of Manyōshū*  
万葉集の起源

### PUBLISHER

Chuokoron-Shinsha  
中央公論新社, 2020

When Japanese people fell in love or lost their loved ones, they had been composing haiku and tanka poems to express their feelings. This ancestral tradition had been passed on from generation to generation and it goes back to the time of Manyōshū (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves) – the first anthology of Japanese poetry. Raising questions on how the absence of a loved one was sung in Manyōshū and on the roots of these songs, the author takes a closer look at the song culture of ethnic minorities in China by referring to the essence of Japanese lyric expression.



### AUTHOR

Ryoko Miyazaki 宮崎涼子

### TITLE

*Unfinished Sanctuary: One  
Hundred Years of Managing  
and Planning the Grounds  
of Gyeongbokgung Palace*  
未完の聖地—景福宮  
宮城再編事業の100年

### PUBLISHER

Kyoto University Press  
京都大学学術出版会, 2020

Miyazaki Ryōko's *The Unfinished Sanctuary* is a meticulously detailed study of the shifting politics in the preservation and maintenance of the Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul. She traces the changes in its symbolic role from the architectural restoration of the palace during the era of the Korean Empire to its cultural appropriation under Japanese colonial rule, and then its reinvention in postwar South Korea as an icon of democratization. Drawing upon a wealth of archival materials, Miyazaki demonstrates how the enduring legacy of the palace has been contested through these critical stages in Korean and Japanese modernity.



## IBP 2021 German Language Winner

**AUTHOR** Daniel Leese

**TITLE** *Maos langer Schatten. Chinas Umgang mit der Vergangenheit / Mao's long shadow. China's handling of the past*

**PUBLISHER** C.H. Beck, 2020.

Meticulously researched and elegantly written, rich in detail and daring in its conclusions about none less than timeless questions of dealing with historical guilt, this book takes a pivotal moment in the history of the Chinese Communist Party as its point of departure: the crucial decade after Mao's death in 1976, which saw significant changes in China's economy and society. First and foremost, as the book argues, this was a period of transitional justice. While the "mistakes" of late Maoism (e.g. the Cultural Revolution) were attributed to a small group of people, the "Gang of Four", the Party attempted, at the same time, to do justice to the many who had been implicated in factional fighting and whose "crimes" needed to be rehabilitated. Based on a digital archive at <https://maoistlegacy.de>, the book enhances our awareness of the importance of the Maoist past for the Chinese present.

### IBP 2021 German Language Shortlist



**AUTHOR** Marcel Berni

**TITLE** *Außer Gefecht: Leben, Leiden und Sterben »kommunistischer« Gefangener in Vietnams amerikanischem Krieg* Incapacitated: The Life, Suffering and Death of 'Communist' Prisoners in Vietnam's American War

**PUBLISHER** Hamburger Edition, 2020.

Based on a wide range of newly discovered historical sources, this fascinating book provides an in-depth account of the atrocities at the hands of US and South Vietnamese soldiers during the Vietnam war. In an extraordinarily vivid account, Marcel Berni relentlessly reveals the 'communist' prisoners' experience of violence, and describes the life in prison, harassment and torture. This book stands out not only for its detailed and dense descriptions, but also for its thorough analysis of the ways in which violence and the enactment of power and control intersect. It also provides insights into how acts of violence are justified and normalised, how they unfold along the hierarchies within the military and how challenging not only the prosecution but also the reappraisal of these traumatising experiences continues to be.



**AUTHOR** Markus Rüsich

**TITLE** *Argumente des Heiligen. Rhetorische Mittel und narrative Strukturen in Hagiographien am Beispiel des japanischen Mönchs Shinran* / Arguments about the Holy: Rhetoric Means and Narrative Structures in Hagiographies, Using the Example of the Japanese Monk Shinran

**PUBLISHER** Iudicium Verlag, 2019.

Rüsich develops a methodology for analysing hagiographies that encompasses rhetorical strategies, paratexts, and narratological aspects. He also situates 'the holy' as an object of investigation in a way that is not theological but takes the inner religious logic of this concept seriously. Rüsich's in-depth analysis of hagiographies from the fifteenth to the twentieth century focuses on the interplay of (literary) narrative and (religious) doctrine, an approach that promises to be fruitful for other regions and epochs.



**AUTHOR** Lianming Wang

**TITLE** *Jesuitenerbe in Peking: Sakralbauten und transkulturelle Räume 1600-1800* Jesuit Heritage in Beijing: Sacred Buildings and Transcultural Spaces, 1600-1800

**PUBLISHER** Universitätsverlag Winter, 2020.

This is a very complex and highly interesting enquiry into the material heritage of the Jesuit mission in Peking between 1600 and 1800. The book combines themes of architectural history with urban studies that are examined from a transcultural and global perspective. Wang Lianming discusses architectural styles, religious transnationalism, and religious patronage drawing upon insights from different parts of the world, displaying their connectivities, frontiers and transformations over time. Material representations are also analysed against the backdrop of identity and representational politics. The book provides fascinating insights into the relations between religious and political structures, also delving into the dynamics of public communication. It is clearly written and the written narrative gains from the many photographs and illustrations.



**AUTHOR** Tobias Weiß

**TITLE** *Auf der Jagd nach der Sonne. Das Journalistische Feld und die Atomkraft in Japan* Chasing the Sun: The journalistic Field and the Nuclear Power in Japan

**PUBLISHER** Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, 2019.

After the Fukushima accident of 2011, numerous studies devoted to the examination of the anti-nuclear movement in Japan appeared. Yet, the much more interesting question is how the pro-nuclear lobby managed to keep the image of nuclear power positive well into the 21st century, even though it had long since turned negative in many other countries. In his book, Weiß dissects the micro-politics within three large Japanese media companies by combining in-depth interviews with a content analysis of a large body of newspaper articles and historical materials. In the course of doing so, the extraordinary means the Japanese nuclear industry resorted to in order to control public discourse on nuclear power become visible, but at the same time Weiß also shows the significant degree of autonomy some newspapers managed to retain both before and after the Fukushima accident.



## IBP 2021 Russian Language Winner

**AUTHOR** Павел Трощинский [Pavel Troshchinskiy]

**TITLE** *Правовая система Китая* Legal system of China

**PUBLISHER** Институт Дальнего Востока Российской Академии Наук, 2018

This is the first comprehensive book in Russian dedicated to the modern Chinese legal system. The book represents an in-depth study of the legal system of modern China through an analysis of the legislation, ancient (traditional) law, classical and contemporary legal culture as well as a legal consciousness. The research contains a detailed description of the main stages of the development of the legal system from the establishing of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to the present time. The chapters of the book examine the influence of tradition on the legal system, the relationship between law and politics, law and ideology in Chinese society as well as the "socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics".

### IBP 2021 Russian Language Shortlist



**AUTHORS** Ли Син, Дмитрий Савкин, Елена Завьялова, Ван Чэньсин [Li Xing, Dmitry Savkin, Elena Zavyalova, Wang Chenxing],

**TITLE** *Китай и Россия: Новое евразийское экономическое партнерство? China and Russia: New Eurasian Economic Partnership?*

**PUBLISHER** Издательство "Нестор-История", 2018.

The book's main content is devoted to the new foreign policy philosophy of China and the integration potential of the Silk Road Economic Belt for Central Asia. The book discusses the objective prerequisites of integration processes, as well as the Eurasian future of Russia in the light of the alternation of integration and disintegration cycles and the Eurasian Economic Union in Chinese political science. The second part of the book focuses on China and Russia as two forces in the system of Eurasian regional governance, as well as on strategic interaction and challenges to Sino-Russian relations. The most important issue is the forms and prospects of interaction between Russia and China in different formats.



**AUTHORS** Григорий Лошкин, Евгений Кобелев, Владимир Мазырин [Grigoriy Lokshin, Evgeniy Kobelev, Vladimir Mazyurin]

**TITLE** *Сообщество АСЕАН в современном мире / The ASEAN Community in the Modern World*

**PUBLISHER** "ИНФРА-М" ИД "ФОРУМ", 2019

The presented monograph is one of the first successful attempts in Russia of comprehensive analysis of the processes South Asia. The relevance of the study is due to the increasing role of ASEAN in the world economy and politics, increasing rivalry between the United States, China, Japan, and India for influence in the region and the exploitation of its resources. The monograph examines the results of half a century of activity of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the first steps of the triune ASEAN Community, proclaimed in 2015, consisting of a political security community, economic and socio-cultural communities.



**AUTHOR** Мгер Саакян [Mher Sahakyan]

**TITLE** *Инициатива Китая «Один Пояс, Один Путь» и Армения* China's "One Belt, One Road" Initiative And Armenia

**PUBLISHER** Фонд «Совет политических и стратегических исследований "Китай-Евразия"», 2019.

The book analyzes the impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on the global political and economic situation and also evaluates this initiative from the point of view of China's national security. The aim of the research is to draw up a strategic "road map" through which Armenia can be involved in the Chinese political and economic project, promoting political, military-technical, financial, and economic cooperation between China and Armenia. The book also discusses the possibility of using the Armenian community of China as a factor of Armenian "soft power" within the framework of the "Belt and Road" initiative.



**AUTHORS** Николай Гусаков, Инна Андропова, Ирина Белова, Виктор Пинчук, Эвелина Богачева, Екатерина Колотырина, Марина Решетникова, Филипп Белов [Nikolay Gusakov, Inna Andronova, Irina Belova, Victor Pinchuk, Evelina Bogacheva, Ekaterina Kolotyryna, Marina Reshetnikova, Philipp Belov]

**TITLE** *Страновые особенности формирования национальных инновационных систем (НИС) в условиях нарастания неопределенности мировой экономики*

**PUBLISHER** Издательство "Экон-Информ", 2019.

The book examines the theoretical foundations of the formation and functioning of national innovation systems (NIS) in Asia; peculiarities of NIS development in the context of growing uncertainty of the world economy; successful experience in the formation of NIS in foreign countries (Kazakhstan, China, South Africa), in which the period for the formation of their own innovative potential was comparatively shorter than the experience of the leading Western powers.

# IBP 2021 Korean Language Edition

TOTAL SUBMISSIONS

43 Books

Organizing Institute: Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC)  
Secretary: Jong-Cheol Kim  
Acting Secretary: Juliana Lee  
Reading Committee Members: Jae-hoon Shim and Jong-wook Hong (humanities); Yungjin Lee and In-Sung Jang (social sciences)  
Sponsor of the IBP 2021 Korean Language Edition: Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC)



## IBP 2021 Korean Language Winner

AUTHOR 박훈 (Hun Park)

TITLE [메이지유신과 사대부적 정치문화] / The Meiji Revolution and the Emergence of the Political Culture of the Literati

PUBLISHER 서울대학교출판문화원 / Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2020

The author challenges squarely the traditional interpretation that explains the Meiji Revolution as a result of the modernist embryo and the shock of the West combined. By focusing on Confucianism, the common ideological resource of East Asia, the book illuminates how the spread of the 'political culture of the literati' in the Edo period prepared for the modernity of the Meiji Revolution. Unlike Joseon or China, the scholarly Confucian vision of samurai was the key driver of the Meiji Revolution. The book analyzes the 'scholarly network' of the samurai and the politics of public opinions including sending letters to illustrate the 'political culture of the literati'. The author looked beyond the abstract and linear historical perspective that only saw either Japan or the world, straight at the historical world of East Asia. This monograph is a monumental achievement of Korea's tradition of studies in Asian history.

### IBP 2021 Korean Language Shortlist



AUTHOR 김영제 (Youngjae Kim)  
TITLE [고려상인과 동아시아 무역사]. 푸른역사  
The History of Koryo Merchants and East Asia Trade  
PUBLISHER Bluehistory, 2019

The medieval East Asian sea was a place of transnational, trans-ethnic exchanges. The author escapes from a single-state or nationalist perspective to approach the substance of the maritime trade of Koryo and Song. The author, who majored in the social-economic history of Tang and Song Dynasties, reconfigured the backbone of East Asian trade history using new sources that Chinese or Japanese academia did not focus on. Such an attempt of the author supports the effort of the Korean academia to read Koryo as a society of diversity and openness and earns the significance of filling in the missing link of East Asian maritime history which has been partial to the trade between Japan and China.



AUTHOR 강희정 (Heejung Kang)  
TITLE [아편과 광동의 궁전: 동남아의 근대와 페낭 화교사회]. 푸른역사  
The Palace Built through Opium and Tin: Chinese Society and Peranakan Culture in Penang, Malaysia  
PUBLISHER Bluehistory, 2019

This book examines the formation and development of Peranakan society in Penang, Malaysia, from the late 18th century to the early 20th century with the keywords: opium, tin, and rubber. The idea of history as suggested by this book is shaped by various classes in the global peripheries and shows the possibility of a world history that transcends the existing one. Further, the significance of this book is more than just being Korea's first full-fledged historical study of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. Upon reading, one would look forward to the stimulation and contribution of an Asian's view on Asia to Asian studies around the world.



AUTHOR 김종영 (Jongyoung Kim)  
TITLE [하이브리드 한의학: 근대, 권력, 창조]. 돌베개 / Hybrid Korean Medicine  
PUBLISHER Dolbegae, 2019

This book is an excellent work that explains through case studies the process of Korea's traditional medicine securing social power through institutionalization (scientification, hybridization, industrialization) in the power-landscape of Korean society dominated by modern Western medicine. The author rejects the static dichotomy of tradition vs. modernity and offers a dynamic understanding of a hybrid modernity through the cases of modernized Korean medicine. This new perspective of modernity as open, contingent, and irregular transcends the limitations in the fragmentary understanding of modernity spurned by the two axes of dispute in the nature of Korean modernity, colonial modernization theory and internal development theory, thus presenting a unique view in the tradition-modernity debate.



AUTHOR 김주희 (Joohee Kim)  
TITLE [레이디 크레딧: 성매매, 금융의 얼굴을 하다]. 현실문화  
Lady Credit: Finance, the Hidden Agenda behind Prostitution  
PUBLISHER Hyunsilbook, 2020

This book is an exceptional empirical study that thoroughly explains the structural mode of the neoliberal financial economy that instigates prostitution in Korea. The author illuminates how the prostitution industry exceeds the scale of the private economic trade of prostitutes and becomes rationalized and legalized in the neoliberal financial system. The book boasts a practical research objective that allowed successful observation and analysis, as well as wide theoretical knowledge, thoughtful interviews, detailed narratives, and the informational strength that probed the financial economy of prostitution. It overcomes the limitations of the feminist perspective that criticizes the industry within the frameworks of human rights and ethics. Instead, this book offers a new perspective to reconfigure the prostitution problem as a problem of women in the era of financial capitalism.

## IBP 2021 Hong Kong Article Prize



TOTAL SUBMISSIONS

98 Articles

36 humanities  
62 social sciences

Organizing Institute: Society for Hong Kong Studies  
Secretary: Dr. Edmund Cheng  
Acting Secretary: Dr. Edmund Cheng  
Reading Committee Members: Elizabeth Sinn, Jeffrey Wasserstrom, and Pang Laikwan (humanities); Joseph Chan, Anita Chan, and Tak-Wing Ngo (social sciences)  
Sponsor of the IBP 2021 Hong Kong Article Prize: Society for Hong Kong Studies

### Humanities Winner

Florence Mok, 2019, "Public Opinion Polls and Covert Colonialism in British Hong Kong", *China Information* 33(1): 66-87.

Florence Mok's essay explores the mechanism and process of surveillance and information collection, a level of history generally neglected by historians of government who tend to focus overly on the policy-making or the effect of policy – often just the rhetoric – paying little attention to how policy is actually carried out. The article demonstrates Hong Kong's colonial statecraft in the 1970s struggling to learn about the opinions of the masses while preventing the masses from knowing that their opinions actually mattered. The article also provides valuable insights to explain why the residents generally approved the government despite its colonial nature.

### Humanities Shortlist

Yu Po Sang, 2020, "Citizen curation and the online communication of folk economics: the China collapse theory in Hong Kong social media", *Media, Culture & Society* 42(7-8):1392-1409.

Winnie W C Lai, 2018, "Happy Birthday to You": Music as Nonviolent Weapon in the Umbrella Movement", *Hong Kong Studies* 1(1):66-82.

Agnes Shuk-mei Ku, 2019, "In Search of a New Political Subjectivity in Hong Kong – The Umbrella Movement as a Street Theatre of Generational Change", *The China Journal* 82:111-132.

Yui Chim Lo, 2020, "The Last Stand of Colonialism? The Unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils and the Sino-British Negotiations over Hong Kong, 1982-1984", *The Journal of Imperial and*

*Commonwealth History* 48(2):370-394.

Kimburley Choi, Annie Chan & Anita Chan, 2020, "Producing 'luxury' housing: Developers' strategies and housing advertisements in Hong Kong (1961-2011)", *Urban Studies* 57(16):3252-3280.

Gina Marchetti, 2019, "Sexual citizenship and social justice in the HKSAR: Evans Chan's Raise the Umbrellas (2016)", *JUMP CUT* no.59.

Vivian Kong, 2020, "Whiteness, Imperial Anxiety, and the 'Global 1930s': The White British League Debate in Hong Kong", *Journal of British Studies* 59(2): 343-37.

### Social Sciences Winner

Samson, Yuen, "Native-Place Networks and Political Mobilization: The Case of Post-Handover Hong Kong", *Modern China Online* First June 2020.

Samson Yuen's carefully researched and rigorously argued article clearly demonstrates the rapid expansion of native-place associations and their cultural and political functions in the Hong Kong SAR, a phenomenon of which many people only have an impressionistic understanding at best. It explores in detail how the Chinese state has utilized the cultural identity of native-place associations to build up a pro-China network in Hong Kong. The findings fill an important gap in our understanding of brokerage politics under Chinese rule.

### Social Sciences Shortlist

Tetsuro Kobayashi, 2020, "Depolarization through social media use: Evidence from dual identifiers in Hong Kong", *New Media & Society* 22(8):1339-1358.

Siu-lun Chow, King-wa Fu & Yu-Leung Ng, 2020, "Development of the Hong Kong Identity Scale: Differentiation between Hong Kong 'Locals' and Mainland Chinese in Cultural and Civic Domains", *Journal of Contemporary China* 29(124):568-584.

Lake Lui & Sara Curran, 2020, "I wish I were a plumber!": Transnational class reconstructions across migrant experiences among Hong Kong's professionals and managers", *Current Sociology* 68(7):872-890.

Denise Tse-Shang Tang, Diana Khor & Yi-Chien Chen, 2019, "Legal recognition of same-sex partnerships: A comparative study of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan", *The Sociological Review* 68(1):192-208.

Yi Kang, 2020, "Social empowerment through knowledge transfer: Transborder actions of Hong Kong social workers in mainland China", *China Information* 35(2):179-200.

Ho, P.S.Y., Jackson, S., & Kong, S.S.-T., 2018, "Speaking against silence: Finding a voice in Hong Kong Chinese families through the Umbrella Movement", *Sociology* 52(5):966-982.

Travis SK Kong, 2019, "Transnational queer sociological analysis of sexual identity and civic-political activism in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China", *British Journal of Sociology* 70(5):1904-1925.

# Hydropolitics in China

For *News from Australia and the Pacific*, we ask contributors to reflect on their own research and the broader academic field in Australia and the Pacific of which it is a part. We focus on current, recent or upcoming projects, books, articles, conferences and courses, while identifying related interests and activities of fellow academics in the field. Our contributions aim to give a broad overview of Asia-related studies in Australia and beyond, and to highlight exciting intellectual debates on and with Asia in the region. The style of our essays is subjective and informal. Rather than offering fully-fledged research reports, our contributions give insight into the motivations behind and directions of various types of conversations between Asia and the region. In the current edition, we focus on hydropolitics in China.

Articles are edited by Edwin Jurriëns [edwin.jurriens@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:edwin.jurriens@unimelb.edu.au) from the Asia Institute at The University of Melbourne <https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/asia-institute>

## The hydropolitics of China's latest mega water project

Sarah Rogers

Since 2014, the drinking water supply of Beijing and Tianjin has come almost exclusively from the Danjiangkou Reservoir 1000km away. Thanks to the massive South-North Water Transfer scheme, wealthy city residents turn on their taps and consume clean water from an economically marginalised part of central China. The scheme, the most recent of China's mega water projects, brings water from the Yangtze River and its tributaries to drier parts of northern China, mostly for urban and industrial use.

For the past three years, as part of an Australian Research Council grant "The Technopolitics of China's South-North Water Transfer Project,"<sup>1</sup> I have been studying the impacts of the South-North Water Transfer Project on the Danjiangkou region. With colleagues from the University of Melbourne, Nanjing's Hehai University and Wuhan's Changjiang Water Resources Protection Institute, I visited the Danjiangkou Reservoir itself (the source of the scheme's Middle Route), surrounding counties in Henan Province, and upstream counties in Shaanxi Province to interview farmers and officials and to better understand how this massive inter-basin transfer scheme is reshaping local economies, livelihoods, and environments.

The counties that surround the reservoir, including Xichuan County in Henan Province, have experienced sustained impacts since the early 2000s: first in the need to resettle people and industries in advance of inundation as the Danjiangkou Dam height was raised, and then in pursuit of strict water quality targets. The Danjiangkou region has suffered entrenched problems of water pollution, from industrial runoff (nearby Shiyan City has since Mao's Third Front<sup>2</sup> been a major car manufacturing base), urban domestic runoff, and agricultural runoff. To achieve drinking water of a high enough standard, there are now strict controls in place for the use of pesticides and fertilisers, farming bans in the Reservoir's "fluctuation zone", as well as projects to improve wastewater treatment in towns and to restructure local economies away from polluting industries like cement, paper, and chemical manufacturing to tourism and organic agricultural production. In a recently published article,<sup>3</sup> my co-author and I begin to document some of these processes and the narratives of sacrifice and opportunity that go with them. With billions



Above: From the Danjiangkou Reservoir, Henan (Image by the author, 2019) to the waters main destination, Beijing (Upsplash, courtesy Li Vang).

of RMB in lost GDP, the responsibility of supplying far-away cities with high quality water has clearly had a huge economic impact on what are quite poor counties in central China. Their successful transformation to "green" development paths is yet to be seen.

In 2019 we began to examine how this prioritisation of water quality is impacting people's livelihoods in Xichuan County. We travelled to several villages that had lost considerable farmland to inundation and where many residents had been resettled to towns in and beyond the county. Our interviews suggest that local smallholders are being squeezed by two powerful forces. The first is government farming bans on what used to be people's contracted farmland (this highly fertile land is exposed for about half of the year when the Reservoir's levels are low), instructions to pursue organic farming instead of using synthetic pesticides and fertilisers, forceful encouragement to plant cash crops instead of corn and wheat, and a ban on livestock close to the Reservoir. In an area where families' landholdings were already very small and have been further constrained by inundation, these directives are coalescing to undermine viable smallholder livelihoods

and further push people to rely on off-farm wage employment. The second force is the preferential treatment given to agribusinesses by local government. Convinced that small farmers are polluting and "backward", local authorities have mediated large-scale land transfers to outside enterprises to establish specialised, "organic" farms. In future these farms will not just produce fruit, but are also designed to attract city dwellers to pick, stay in rural guesthouses, and enjoy the local scenery. Where small farmers fit in this new rural future is unclear.

Measured in environmental terms, the interventions at the Danjiangkou Reservoir have been an outstanding success. Water quality in the Reservoir and its tributaries now consistently ranks as Grade I or Grade II, ensuring that the residents of Beijing and Tianjin are consuming water of the highest quality. Factories have mostly been closed, rubbish is regularly swept from the Reservoir's surface, intensive water quality monitoring is conducted, pollution spills are jumped on, and extensive reforestation is taking place to both beautify the local area and to filter the water flowing into the Reservoir. But much like earlier environmental projects of the Chinese state, the South-North Water Transfer Project

is having long-lasting and deeply unequal environmental and socio-economic impacts. A clear example is that while Beijing and Tianjin residents consume high-quality Danjiangkou water, at the time of our last visit in 2019, towns and villages surrounding the Reservoir in Henan were still reliant on polluted groundwater.

Geographers based in Melbourne have for nearly two decades been engaged in documenting and understanding the on-ground impacts of China's environmental governance, including the Three Gorges Project,<sup>4</sup> the Yellow River crisis,<sup>5</sup> environmental resettlement,<sup>6</sup> Shanghai's water insecurity,<sup>7</sup> household water consumption,<sup>8</sup> and the Chinese dam industry's<sup>9</sup> activities in Africa. Our current research into the South-North Water Transfer Project builds on this earlier work and shows the value of sustained, collaborative social science research with Chinese colleagues.

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## The Chinese dam industry goes out

Xiao Han

China has built more than 23,000 dams at home,<sup>1</sup> with the country's installed hydropower capacity reaching 4.17 gigawatts in 2019. The most famous Chinese dam companies include Sinohydro, Gezhouba, and the Three Gorges Corporation. Since the turn of the century, these companies have been actively building large dams and other kinds of water-engineering projects in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. I will briefly characterize the Chinese dam industry and its role in the possible "resurgence"<sup>2</sup> of concrete-heavy forms of water management across the world.<sup>3</sup>

Chinese dam companies are mostly state-owned enterprises (SOEs), corporatized from former government-affiliated organizations. Notably, Sinohydro can be traced back to the head bureau of the country's major water engineering institutes and construction bureaus in the 1980s, including the Gezhouba Bureau. Then, through market-oriented reforms, the Gezhouba Group was established in 1994, independent from the Sinohydro system. All the remaining construction bureaus were corporatized in the 2000s as subsidiary companies of what became known as the Sinohydro Group. Water-



Fig. 1: Ship lock at the Three Gorges Dam. Image in the public domain on Flickr.

related consulting agencies, equipment manufacturing plants, and smaller builders were corporatized too, becoming SOEs at central or provincial levels. The Three Gorges Corporation was created to manage the overall development of the Three Gorges Project – it did not do the actual construction (this was done by Gezhouba and bureaus of Sinohydro) but gained significant experience

in modern project management from planning to operation and maintenance.

While Chinese dam companies retain institutional ties to the Chinese government, the industry has gained technological, managerial and commercial capacities through the building of domestic dams in collaboration with international financiers and peer companies. Since the 1980s, through implementing World Bank-funded projects like the Lubuge and Xiaolangdi dams, Chinese dam players used international standards such as competitive bidding in contracting and adapted international norms for development-induced resettlement into domestic practices. The industry has also learned from international technical exchange and cooperation – for example, in order to build the Three Gorges Dam, Western companies and experts were invited to visit China, while Chinese officials and technicians also attended conferences and visited firms in Western countries.

An unexpected outcome of the international anti-dam campaign<sup>4</sup> that intensified in the late 1990s against World Bank dam financing, is that it offered the Chinese dam industry an

opportunity to turn overseas. At the time of its establishment in the 1990s, while focusing on domestic projects, the central government gave the Gezhouba Group approval to contract overseas projects and dispatch a workforce, as well as the right to import and export its products. Sinohydro, too, started bidding for foreign construction projects in the 1990s and first won a small contract in Bangladesh in 1998.

The Chinese dam industry has continued to respond to government calls, from the "Going-Out" strategy at the turn of the century to the more recent Belt and Road Initiative. Specifically, although the "Going-Out" strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative are sometimes understood as "strikingly similar,"<sup>5</sup> the former is a national policy that encourages Chinese companies to invest overseas, while the latter represents a Chinese call for global actions to promote inclusive globalisation.<sup>6</sup> The 2004 United Nations Symposium on Hydropower and Sustainable Development marked a strong push – by Beijing and others – for hydroelectric dams. Subsequently, the Chinese government agreed to support the dam industry financially. The Chinese dam industry committed to take care of social and



Fig. 2: Ghana's Bui dam, built by China's Sinohydro Corporation, with loans and export credits from the China Exim Bank. Photo by the author, mid-2015.

## China's new "River Chiefs"

Mark Wang and Nahui Zhen

Chinese rulers have long understood the critical importance of water in ensuring social stability and their own political longevity. The fight with water in China can be traced back 4000 years, when Yu the Great of the Xia Dynasty is said to have tamed the Yellow River. In contemporary times China has become known as a water conservation giant.<sup>1</sup> It has the most dams in the world, the largest hydropower project (the Three Gorges Dam), and the largest inter-basin water diversion scheme (the South-to-North Water Transfer Project).<sup>2</sup> The focus of these engineering projects is finding solutions to water supply. While these solutions have to some extent addressed water security problems, they are not only expensive but have also caused profound social-environmental impacts.<sup>3</sup> Pollution also remains a key driver of water insecurity and has proved in the past to be an intractable problem. According to China's Environmental Protection Law, the local government is responsible for the environmental governance within their jurisdictions. While the Water Conservation Department supervises and manages water

resources in general and the Environmental Protection Department is responsible for water pollution control, several other departments – e.g., the Housing and Construction, Agriculture, Forestry, Development and Reform, Transportation, Marine and Fishery – participate in the water-related management within their respective responsibilities.

This situation in which the responsibilities for water management are divided into various jurisdictional areas and engaged government agencies was termed as "nine dragons ruling the waters", which is often seen as the root cause of unsatisfactory results in water governance.

In response to current failures, in 2016, the central government required the full establishment of the River (Lake) Chief System (RCS) across the country. Under the RCS, the top officials at different levels of government are appointed as river or lake chiefs within their jurisdiction. The RCS was actually first introduced in Wuxi Prefecture, Jiangsu Province. In 2007, Wuxi was severely affected by a microcystis bloom in Lake Taihu,<sup>4</sup> leaving more than two

million people without clean drinking water. To deal with the water pollution crisis, the Wuxi government listed water quality of the river/lake sections flowing into Lake Taihu as one of the performance evaluation criteria for local officials. Such a system achieved immediate results in improving water quality in Wuxi and was thereafter quickly promoted to the entire Lake Taihu Basin. By the end of 2018, the RCS was established throughout China: there are now more than 300,000 river chiefs at the provincial, municipal, county, and township levels, and nearly one million river chiefs at the village level.<sup>5</sup>

How does the RCS work? Figure 1 not only shows how the RCS addresses the 'nine dragons ruling the waters' problem, but also shows the key expected outcomes of such a system: clean water, clean rivers, greener riverbanks, and a more beautiful landscape. The four cartoon figures represent different local departments as a lion dancing team following the River Chief's rhythms and beats. The RCS allows the River Chiefs to maximise monetary and personnel resources within their jurisdiction, particularly in mobilising all local officials and departments to work together as a joint force to manage the lakes and rivers, resulting in the 'nine dragons' working for one immediate boss.

While the RCS lays the full responsibility of water pollution and other related issues with River Chiefs in their jurisdiction areas, the River Chiefs' performance is managed by the top-down target responsibility system

of China's Party-state.<sup>6</sup> The River Chief of the higher-level government evaluates the performance of their lower-level River Chiefs based on whether the water quality along the river sections meets pre-determined targets. These 'hard' targets and other accountability mechanisms are an important driving force for motivating River Chiefs to commit to water protection.

It is too soon to fully evaluate water quality improvements resulting from this system. However, an increasing number of rivers and lakes in China have improved their water quality 'grade', and since the implementation of the RCS, the proportion of water bodies with high water quality has increased. It also seems, however, that the RCS has had uneven results: wealthier regions and regions with stricter environmental restrictions have seen better outcomes from this system and more effective water pollution control.<sup>7</sup> The RCS enables River Chiefs to mobilise extraordinary administrative resources in a short time, but the sustainability of these results is yet unknown.

Local officials are clearly being made more accountable for local river management. River Chiefs themselves, however, can have limited knowledge about integrated river, catchment, and basin management. Such knowledge gaps may inhibit the RCS's efficacy. The RCS is still in its early stage of development: ongoing evaluation is needed of its long-



Fig. 3: Bui resettlement community. Photo by the author, mid-2015.

environmental issues and engage with other international actors for both domestic and foreign dam projects and governments of project host countries promised to conduct hydropower-related planning and provide appropriate local conditions.

In some cases this came to fruition: Ghana's Bui Dam Project, built between 2008 and 2013 is one example. The China Exim Bank provided the majority of project funding through concessional loans and export credits; Sinohydro served as the Dam's turnkey builder based on the internationally-accepted engineering-procurement-construction format; and the Ghanaian government established the Bui Power Authority as the project owner to manage the overall development of the Bui Dam Project. The Bui Power

Authority in turn hired a British firm for the Dam's impact assessments and resettlement planning, entrusted a French firm to supervise Sinohydro's work, and executed all project-induced resettlement activities. However, in other cases, dam projects with Chinese involvement encountered serious protests against unnecessary social and environmental losses.<sup>7</sup>

In short, the Chinese dam industry is based on complex relations between government and corporations, and has gained considerable capacity through its relations with international peers. The Chinese dam export industry has benefited from the global anti-dam movement. As international financiers stepped away, China's financial institutions continued to sponsor governments

that remained interested in large dams. My previous research shows that China's role in advocating for concrete-heavy forms of water management is highly variegated, influenced by China's broader policies on the one hand and by beneficiary countries on the other.<sup>8/9</sup> And while activists and NGOs target the Chinese dam industry over specific projects, the global anti-dam campaign continues.<sup>10</sup> All of these forces will continue to shape the future of Chinese dam exports.

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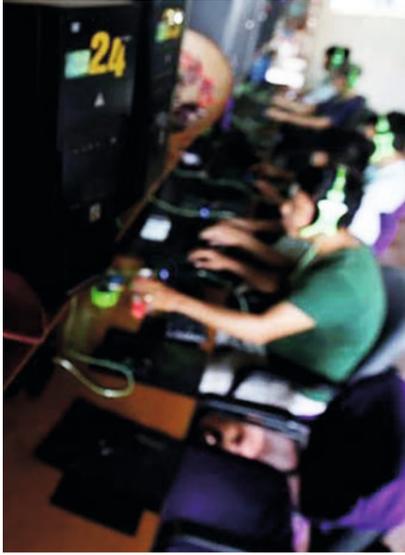
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Fig. 1: China's river chief system. Courtesy CSRCARE.





Above: Men use computers at an internet cafe in Hanoi, Vietnam. Photo: Reuters.

a cable car into what is billed as Vietnam's cave kingdom,<sup>12</sup> a plan to fell nearly 7,000 trees in the capital of Hanoi,<sup>13</sup> or a calamitous fish kill along the country's central coastline.<sup>14</sup>

The authorities have tried to appear as responsive to public sentiment online as they could, but not without some caveats: collective action or social unrest, their bête noire, could arise from the fact that criticism of the government's policies in a certain area quickly spreads to another, perpetuating a spiralling cycle of public disenchantment. Vietnam's online movements – most of them initiated, coalesced and sustained by youths during the 2014–2016 period – have revolved around that dynamic, which remains relevant today.

More than two decades since the internet's arrival in Vietnam, anti-state content has been exhausted as a pretext for the authorities to rationalize reining in the online sphere (see Chart 2). Since 2008, Facebook has become part and parcel of Vietnam's online censorship regime. At the same time, Vietnam's lack of political and technological wherewithal and limited home-grown social media platforms have throttled its efforts to match China in creating a "national internet" meant for the enforced blocking of Western social media platforms.

Having tried for nearly a decade to exert greater control over information online, the Vietnamese authorities now recognize that they cannot act like China and ban foreign tech giants altogether. But they may have realized that it is a tall order to build a domestic social networking site that could stand shoulder to shoulder with the likes of China's WeChat or

Weibo. In that context, it remains to be seen if Vietnam has the incentive to erect a China-style internet firewall, given that it has been able to somehow co-opt Facebook and YouTube.

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toleration, responsiveness, and repression. In fact, responsiveness and legitimacy are all the more crucial to the resilience of an authoritarian regime like Vietnam.

Authorities have sometimes looked to social media as a useful yardstick to gauge public grievances and, wherever appropriate, take remedial actions to mollify the masses. Such public grievances have centred on environmental concern and the government's mishandling of bread-and-butter issues. They could be vented against a local move to build

## Digital media: an emerging barometer of public opinion in Malaysia

Pauline Pooi Yin Leong

Digital media has become an essential communication channel for both the government and the opposition in Malaysia, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media is the platform that politicians and their parties use to issue press releases and to livestream their press conferences. It has also become a barometer of public opinion as it facilitates reactions from netizens about current socio-political issues. While Facebook dominates the digital landscape, younger Malaysians prefer other social media sites such as Twitter and Reddit. In fact, the Malaysian Twitter community calls itself Twitterjaya, a play on the word *Putrajaya*, which is the name of the seat of government in Malaysia.

Syahredzan Johan, a prominent lawyer who joined Twitter in 2009, wrote that "[t]he social aspects of Twitter have evolved into a socio-political gauge of national sentiments".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, public uproar on social media over certain government initiatives and policies have resulted in reversals and apologies. For example, when the country was under a Movement Control Order (MCO) due to COVID-19 in 2020, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development published a series of posters on Facebook and Instagram advising married women on how to manage their households and avoid domestic arguments. This included dressing well, not nagging, and speaking coyly with a feminine laugh—mimicking the voice of Doraemon, a Japanese cartoon cat.<sup>2</sup> Public flack over the ministry's statements, especially on social media, led it to apologize and delete the posts. The Higher Education Minister also received public criticism for suggesting a TikTok competition to persuade Malaysian youths to stay at home.<sup>3</sup> Netizens pointed out that the minister should have focused on the welfare and learning of undergraduate students instead.

Malaysian politicians are aware that their online reputation has an impact on their political fortunes. For example, the appointment of Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin

by the King as the country's eighth prime minister on 1 March 2020 came under a cloud of protest. Muhyiddin had been centrally associated with the "Sheraton Move" that saw more than 30 MPs defecting from the then Pakatan Harapan government, causing its collapse. Social media users vented their frustrations online. The hashtag "#NotMyPM" trended on Twitter with more than 47,000 tweets. However, others disagreed with the sentiment: they felt that it was disrespectful to the King, while Muhyiddin's supporters congratulated him on his appointment.<sup>4</sup> Realising the damage to his political reputation, Muhyiddin rebranded himself as *abah* ("father"), relying on his easy-going paternal demeanour during press conferences when he marked his hundredth day in office.<sup>5</sup>

Other ministers linked to the Sheraton Move also attempted to reinvent themselves. Women, Family, and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Rina Mohd Harun's recent 2021 Hari Raya fashion photo shoot at her ministerial office to showcase her transformative weight loss did not sit well with Twitterjaya. Netizens criticised her for focusing more on her personal achievements than her role in assisting women and children affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online political communication requires sophistication and subtlety, as shown by Science, Technology, and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin. When he suffered minor injuries after hitting a pothole while cycling in Banting, Selangor, the newly elected president of the Negeri Sembilan Cycling Association tweeted, "Pothole, ditch, KJ. 2020 keeps giving", together with pictures of his bruised face and the accident area. Many Twitter users commiserated with him, sharing their own personal experiences of being similarly injured.<sup>6</sup> The Kuala Langat district's Public Works Department (PWD), which is responsible for road conditions in Banting, apologized and immediately filled up the pothole. Critics, however, decried the department's double standards, stating that it should also apologize to other road users who have been similarly injured. In response to the criticisms, Khairy

said that the PWD should not just pay attention to the issue because of his status, but should take pro-active measures to address it. He mooted the idea of a special online complaints portal for potholes, saying he would discuss this with the Works Ministry as soon as possible.<sup>7</sup> Khairy's ability to deflect criticisms and turn matters into positive publicity shows his finesse in navigating the possible potholes (pun intended) in the online environment.

While public opinion on digital media may not represent the full spectrum and diversity of views in Malaysia, it is, to a significant extent, a barometer of the sentiments of politically aware citizens. These articulate members of the online community may not exemplify the majority, but their discussions may gain sufficient traction and thus influence the direction of mass public opinion. For example, a Twitter campaign #KitaMintaLima (We Ask for Five) urged the King to grant five specific requests from the people to combat the economic and public health issues that emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These requests were compiled from netizens' comments on an Istana Negara Facebook post, which showed the monarch granting Prime Minister Muhyiddin an audience for a pre-Cabinet meeting. If the five requests could not be fulfilled, then the campaign poster urged for a change of government.<sup>8</sup> More than 48,000 tweets with the hashtag were posted, which made it one of Twitter's top trending topics in Malaysia.

As we can see, there is always the possibility that ideas which emerge online ignite the imagination of the masses and lead to offline ground activism. Politicians from both sides of the divide are conscious of this possibility, and hence actively monitor current trends on digital media. The next general election, which must be held by 2023, is likely to see a highly contested online battle as the politicians and their parties fight for sufficient votes to ensure their survival.

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## Digital Youth and Rhizomatic Protest Movements

Yatun Sastramidjaja

Historically, youth have been at the forefront of democracy struggles in Southeast Asia. As their lifeworlds and means of expression change, so does the nature of their protest. From Indonesia to Thailand and Myanmar, recent youth-led uprisings share key characteristics that bind them across borders and that distinguish this generation of activist youth from previous generations. First, they are digitally-savvy and interconnected. Second, they are imaginative beyond borders, evincing a deterritorialized, yet firmly local, generational consciousness that is evolving into a deterritorialized praxis for political change. Third, they shun and transcend existing political fault lines that have hitherto hampered democracy efforts in their respective countries. These characteristics reflect the 'rhizomatic' nature of their protest. Rather than sprouting from the single 'root' of national histories of student activism in each country, today's youth movements form a heterogeneous assemblage with multiple nodes that expand in multiple directions, much like the digital information and communication flows that shape their protest.

With its young demographics and rapid growth in digital connectivity, at least in urban centres, Southeast Asia is no stranger to digitally-mediated action. Especially since the rise of social media and relatively affordable smartphones in the late 2000s, cyberspace has become a popular vehicle for political expression. In Indonesia, young netizens began experimenting with online campaigns that were not confined to activist circles but invited the participation of the general public. In 2009, two such campaigns against state corruption and injustice created a momentous impact, as thousands of young netizens took to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to co-create, share, and discuss user-generated content to hold the authorities accountable. For a generation disillusioned by the outcome of the political reform initiated in 1998, the success of these cybercampaigns generated a strong sense of participatory power, which could be readily reactivated for specific causes.

In September 2019, tens of thousands of youth across Indonesia took to the streets to protest a set of controversial bills which, to them, symbolized the government's increasing authoritarianism. While the majority of demonstrators were students, the protest brought together a heterogeneous crowd that included NGO-affiliated activist youth, masses of high-school youth mobilized through WhatsApp groups, and a multitude of young netizens that joined the protest online and on the streets – all united under the street banner and hashtag #ReformasiDikorupsi ('reform corrupted').

The participation of the 'meme generation', as young netizens were called, added a particularly novel flavor to the protest, which otherwise could have been mistaken (and frequently was) for a revival of Indonesia's student movement. Although student representative bodies did help to

mobilize student masses, they could not dictate the mood nor the message of the protest, which was created in the moment by the multitude of young participants, many of whom had never joined a protest before. One group that stood out amongst this multitude were the self-proclaimed 'K-Poppers', known for their massive engagement with Korean pop fandom on social media. Online, they helped to raise #ReformasiDikorupsi and associated hashtags on Twitter's list of trending topics; on the streets, they contributed a unique type of protest imagery and slogans, for example: "I [heart] BTS [a popular Korean boyband] but I [heart] justice even more – #K-Poppers won't remain silent!"

Although the street protests subsided due to violent repression, minimal concessions from the government, and then the Covid-19 pandemic, the youth resistance continued unabated online, now focusing on the contested Omnibus Bill for job creation. Indeed, activist youth cleverly used the situation to engage an even broader multitude of young netizens through Twitter. For example, during a concerted Twitter action on 23 March 2020, the hashtag #TolakOmnibuslaw ('reject the Omnibus Bill') topped the trending topics, as young netizens were especially charmed by the paired hashtags #LockdownDPR ('lockdown Parliament') and #dirumahaja ('just stay home', also connoting, 'protest from home'). Similar actions followed over the next months. While such hashtag actions might not have the same public impact as street protest, it kept young participants attuned to a resistance that had the potential for further expansion into new participatory publics.

The significance of nurturing the resistance online became clear in the first week of October 2020, when massive protests again erupted against the Parliament's hastened ratification of the Omnibus Bill. Twitter exploded with anti-Omnibus Law hashtags, again largely pushed by K-poppers, while students and high-school youth, together with labour unions and other disaffected groups, staged angry demonstrations using the same hashtags in their posters and banners. This time, however, the authorities not only repressed the protests on the streets, but also embarked on a targeted strategy of cyber-repression, utilizing cyber-laws, cyber-troops, and 'counternarratives' spread on mainstream and social media to criminalize and delegitimize the protesters. This strategy seemed to work: the street protest quickly died out, and on social media, too, anti-government criticism was more or

less stifled. Nonetheless, the resistance lived on in more subtle ways, not least inspired by similar youth-led struggles that have erupted elsewhere in the region.

### Transnational solidarity and affinity

The blurring of boundaries between virtual and material spaces of protest was all the more evident in the youth resistance in Thailand, which took off in February 2020 following the regime's disbandment of the popular Future Forward Party. While shunning Thailand's polarized political landscape, this youth resistance was also long nurtured through online political criticisms, which has now consolidated into a generational call for systemic reform and curbs on the monarchy's power. Here, too, the youth resistance developed in rhizomatic fashion along fluid networks that crossed online and offline spheres.

This protest strategy is clearly inspired by the 'Be Water' tactics developed by activist youth in Hong Kong. Indeed, activist youth in Thailand have maintained close contact with peers from Hong Kong as well as Taiwan's Sunflower Student Movement since 2016, when they formed the Network of Young Democratic Asians. In a more recent reincarnation as the social media-based Milk Tea Alliance, this transnational network has steadily reached out to youth movements elsewhere in Asia. This includes Myanmar, where an intrepid youth resistance has risen following the military coup of February 2021. Meanwhile, youth across the region have staged solidarity actions online and offline, using the same hashtag format, #StandWithMyanmar and #WhatsHappeningInMyanmar, as initially used for Hong Kong and any subsequent youth-led struggle for democracy.

Through these digitally-mediated networks, activist youth across the region have thus started to cross-promote and cross-pollinate their causes, recognizing that, at the core, they are part of the same rhizomatic resistance against entrenched authoritarianism. Digital technologies have facilitated the emergence of a shared citizen identity as Asian-activist-digital youth.

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Fig. 1: Youth movements across Asia unite in the social media-based Milk Tea Alliance, while using the iconic three-finger salute, adopted from the Hollywood blockbuster *The Hunger Games*. Photo credit: AFP/Jack Taylor.



Fig. 2: Image circulating on social media in October 2019. Source: [https://twitter.com/efi\\_sh/status/1185202306054148096/photo/1](https://twitter.com/efi_sh/status/1185202306054148096/photo/1).

# The Milk Tea Alliance and China's Soft Power Problem in Southeast Asia

Quinton Temby

After a shock election victory in 2018, the resurgent prime minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, banned foreigners from owning property in Forest City, a \$100 billion (USD) "megacity" being built across four artificial islands located between Singapore and the southern tip of Johor. In October 2020, after the abrupt passage of a "job creation" law in Indonesia, labour activists led strikes in the capital and stormed the national parliament complex. In March 2021, amid escalating military violence in Myanmar following the February 1st coup, South Korean and Taiwanese businesses were urged to fly their national flags.<sup>1</sup>

On the face of it, these unpredicted events across Southeast Asia—the end of one-party rule in Malaysia, the rise of labour in Indonesia, the coup and the resistance in Myanmar—have nothing in common. They are disparate events, with local causes. But on closer inspection they share a common undercurrent. They all exhibit signs of anxiety about China and its rise as a hegemonic power in Southeast Asia. Look closely at protests and upheavals across the region and you are increasingly likely to find a China angle.

Anti-Chinese "sentiment", to use the scholarly euphemism, has a deep history in Southeast Asia. And not just against the local ethnic Chinese. In the aftermath of the 1965 coup that brought General Suharto to power in Indonesia, the embassy of the People's Republic of China was ransacked by a mob. But as China establishes itself as the lead economic partner for most countries of the region, and as it extends its military power down through the South China Sea and up into the internet "cloud", racial prejudice shades into geopolitical angst.

The lead indicator of this phenomenon is the Milk Tea Alliance, an online pan-Asian activist network. The alliance began on social media, born of a rapid process of variation and selection for a meme that would be algorithmically optimised to go viral. Pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong, Thailand, and Taiwan led this process as they networked in retaliation against nationalist Chinese trolls. It was an authentic "meme war". The meme has since been inherited by the resistance movement in Myanmar, and flowed to a lesser degree to Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia.

Strategic thinkers in boardrooms with ancient maps and new flatscreens, in Beijing and in Washington, are unlikely to pay much heed to a movement calling itself the Milk Tea Alliance. But that would be a mistake. On the internet, humor builds in-group identity, and irony maintains strategic ambiguity—a hedge against the risk of being "cancelled" by the out-group, a rival "memetic tribe."<sup>2</sup>

The alliance is now in the streets. It stands in solidarity amid the three-finger salutes in Bangkok, the umbrellas in Hong Kong, and the egg Molotov cocktails in Myanmar. The Milk Tea Alliance is only the latest memetic tribe to jump off the internet and into the streets. It will not be the last.

This is because there is a more fundamental force at play. That force is the internet-enabled feedback loop between institutions and the public. Online populist insurgencies can mobilise instantly and scale infinitely, swarming against sclerotic authorities. They crowd-source their viral attacks. It is inherently unpredictable.

The only way to stop this force is to unplug the internet, to shut down social media. This was the first instinct of the generals in Myanmar. They occupied the internet service providers and hacked away at the cables. But this is not the best way to "break the internet" because, in turn, it breaks the economy.

The Milk Tea Alliance is the internet's way of channelling the collective consciousness of a region that is famously diverse and defiant of collective action—as ASEAN can attest. It taps into discontent with the regional decline of democracy and into fears about the rise of China.

At best, these fears sublimate into democratic debate; at worst, they dredge up historical prejudices and dangerous tropes. The latter occurred in Indonesia in 2019 during the post-election violence, when viral disinformation spread claiming that China sent soldiers to infiltrate the country to put down the protests and bolster the Jokowi government.<sup>3</sup> The Indonesian police were forced to hold a press conference to debunk the claims, which had targeted several Indonesian police officers with supposedly Chinese features.

The same trope emerged in Myanmar in March, with false claims made in viral posts on Facebook that Chinese soldiers had been flown in to repress the protest movement.<sup>4</sup> The balance of evidence suggests that China did

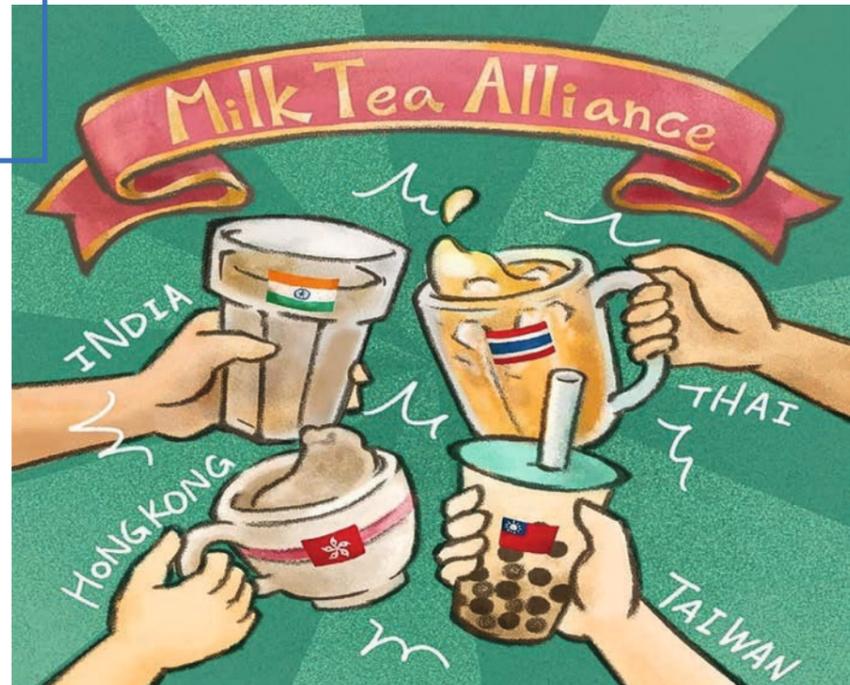


Fig. 1: Milk Tea Alliance illustration.

not support the coup in Myanmar—not least because the government of Aung San Suu Kyi was relatively pro-Beijing. But suspicions ran high online anyway, lending an anti-China edge to the protests. Later, Chinese factories in Yangon were burned by unknown assailants, hence the call by non-Chinese foreigners to fly their flags.

As China rises, we should expect anti-Chinese populism to grow, as old fears blend with new anxieties. Opinion polling by the Pew Research Centre indicates unfavourable views of China spiked globally even prior to the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> The 2001 ISEAS State of Southeast Asia survey of policymakers, academics, think tankers, and businesspeople shows that support for aligning with China versus the US has fallen, despite China's intense pandemic diplomacy efforts.<sup>6</sup>

While most countries of Southeast Asia wish to benefit from economic ties with China, domestic populations are at best sceptical of China's role. China thus suffers a gap between its hard (military, economic) and soft (cultural) power in Southeast Asia. Leading indicators of this power gap can be detected in the protests that gather force online, where soft power is in the hands of digital natives, not political elites.

To the extent that China's power gap reflects an elite-popular divide, China is left vulnerable to populist politics in Southeast Asia. Insurgent politicians may seek to exploit anti-China sentiment to gain office—a trend that has emerged most clearly in Indonesia among the Islamist opposition.

Time will tell whether protests in Southeast Asia cohere into democratic movements

or devolve into anti-Chinese populism. Outcomes will be determined, in part, by how old institutions respond to the challenge of networked protest in the internet age.

This article is adapted from the Fulcrum article, "The Milk Tea Alliance Confronts China's Weak Brew."<sup>7</sup>

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### Notes

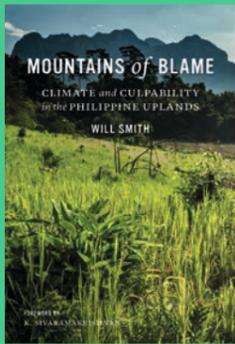
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Fig. 2: Indonesian anti-Chinese propaganda: "Beware the dragon ordering its domesticated dogs to pounce on the Garuda" (Source: Telegram).

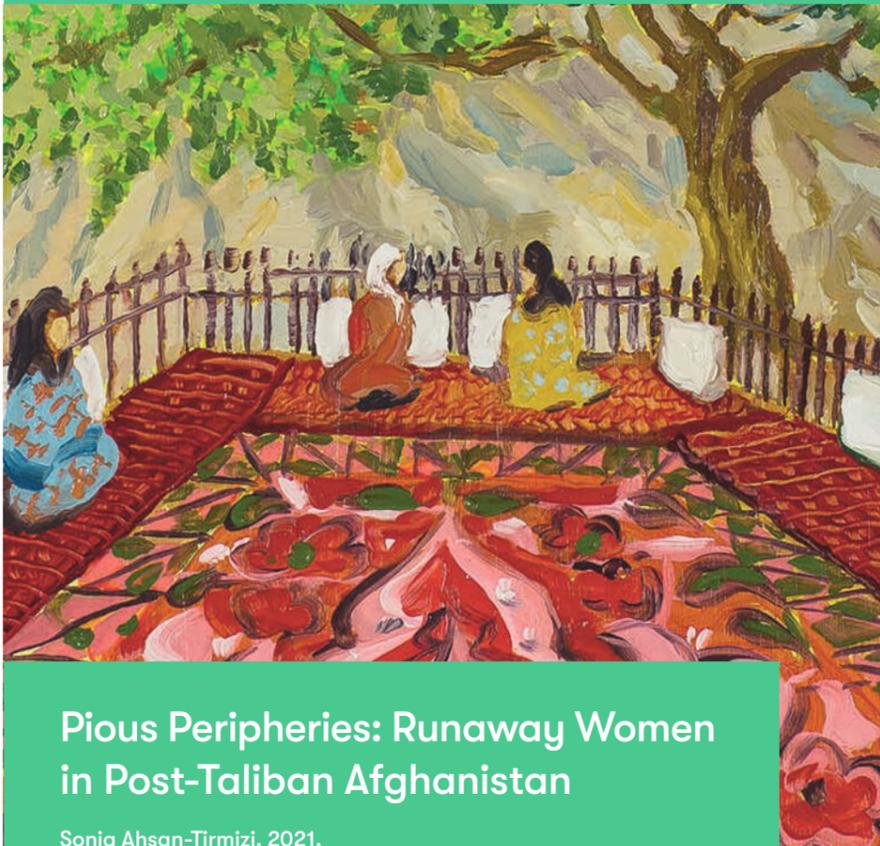
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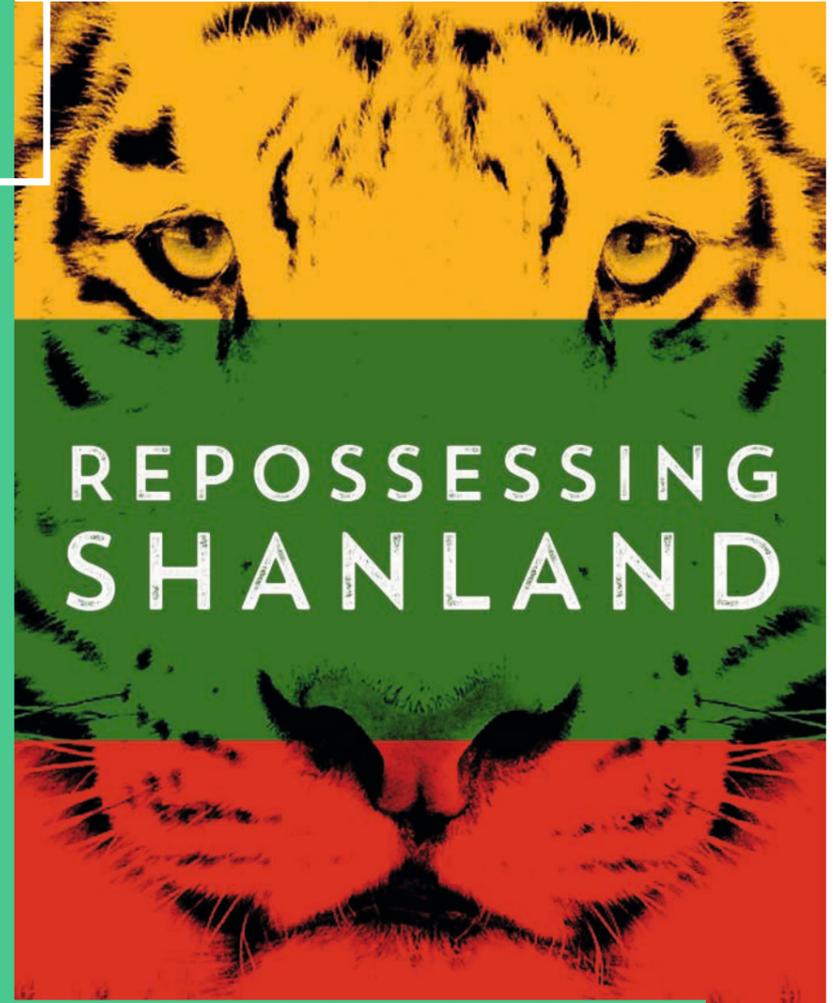
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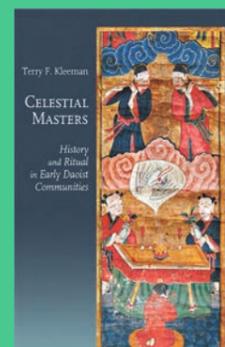
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Fig. 1: Christening gown made in the Netherlands in 1944 from allied parachute silk for a child born on 6 June, D-Day. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2010.0070a).



## Textiles on the move, through time and space

Willem Vogelsang

In October 2020, IAS in Leiden organised a week-long online conference about textile and dress traditions that develop through time and space, and thereby often change their role and meaning. The conference was organised with the assistance of Sandra Sardjono of the Tracing Patterns Foundation in Los Angeles, Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood of the Textile Research Centre (TRC) in Leiden, and Chris Buckley, Oxford. It replaced a 'real' conference that was planned to take place in Leiden, but which had to be postponed because of the corona pandemic.

The present Focus section of The Newsletter contains ten papers. Some were discussed during the conference, others were written afterwards. They all reflect upon the changing roles of textiles in society. Textiles and dress have a significance that transcends their practical function, namely to provide warmth and protection. They also play a central role in social, economic, and spiritual interactions. Textiles and clothing

speak volumes about the hierarchy of power relations amongst their users, including power that defines stratifications of class, wealth, and gender. In most cases, these tangible and intangible values of textiles are culture-specific, and their unspoken functions are fully understood within a particular tradition. Textiles are also repositories of techniques, for spinning, weaving, dyeing, printing, and embroidering, and these techniques travel

over time and space from one group of people to another. The history of textiles also reflects the history of animal husbandry and the growing of plants, in order to produce the fibres needed for the textiles. All these techniques travelled from one group to another, and in the process they changed and adopted new features and meanings.

Textiles moved easily from one area to another because of their portability. Their

measurable value (in the raw material, knowledge, and the time and effort of labour put into them) makes textiles a perfect medium for commercial exchange and as items of tribute. The Silk Route between East and West from the Roman period onwards is a good example. At the same time, their intangible cultural value (as a medium to

*Continued overleaf*



Fig. 2 (left): Traditional Moroccan woman's kaftan made from Japanese material intended for a kimono sash (second half 20th century). Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2001.0074).

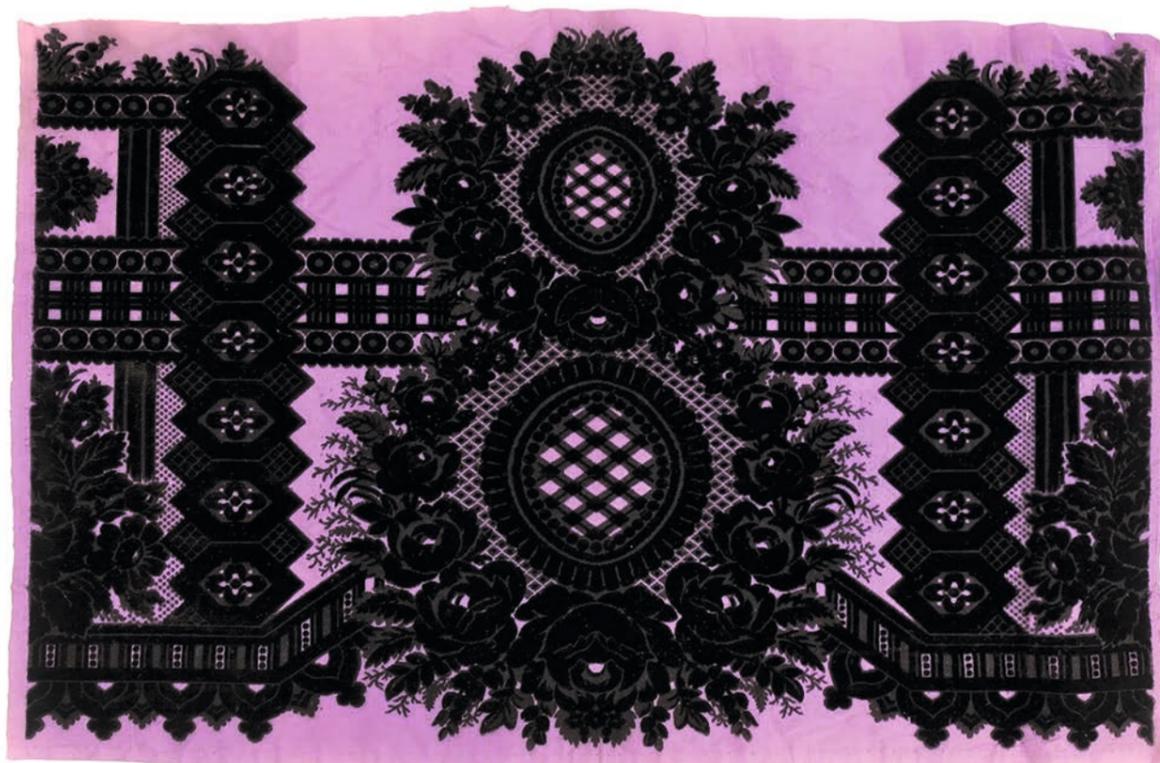


Fig. 3 (right): Velvet panel produced in China in the mid-19th century for the European market, particularly used for the borders of ladies' crinoline dresses. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2018.2401).

express identity) was carried along with them, together with the movement of people. On these journeys textiles would lose their old values, acquire new significance, or communicate messages that may be changed or distorted in their new environments.

The papers below look at specific materials, techniques, uses, and decorations that were used and developed for textiles in one particular region and which then moved, either physically or in the minds of artists and

craftsmen and women, to other parts of the world, thereby changing the meaning of these textiles, their function, and their importance in society [figs. 1, 2 and 3]. The papers not only emphasise the adaptability of textiles to other cultures, over space and time, but they also reflect upon the ever-present process of adoption and adaptation of 'foreign' elements into a local cultural context. These include Indian chintz motifs on 'traditional' regional costume from the island of Marken

in the Netherlands, American jackets being worn by Japanese *yakuza* men, or Chinese decorative designs being incorporated into Latin American 'national' costume.

The conference and some of the papers below were facilitated by the availability of large collections of textiles, namely the Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection in Washington, with some 4,000 textiles from all places and all periods of time (see the papers below by Marie-Eve Celio and Lee Talbot), and in particular the

world-wide collection of the Textile Research Centre in Leiden (35,000 objects; see the papers by Gillian Vogelsang and Francesco Montuori). These collections emphasise the importance of large, open-access, broad-based collections for the study of textile and dress history, especially when focusing on the development and global spread of textile techniques and decorative elements.

In the first paper, Marie-Eve Celio-Scheurer writes about 'Japonisme' in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century, and some of the products of the so-called *Wiener Werkstätte*. She refers to influences going both ways, by Japanese products and artists influencing European textiles and other objects, and by European artists affecting the artistic production of Japanese craftsmen.

The second paper, by Lee Talbot from Washington, takes us to the ancient Silk Route between China and the West, which not only transported silk, but also textiles from East to West and vice versa. This movement introduced new motifs, materials, and techniques in the West, but also in the East.

Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, Director of the Textile Research Centre (TRC) in Leiden, elaborates on the global popularity of an originally Iranian motif, the *buteh*, which in the early 19th century was copied in the Scottish town of Paisley and hence became known world-wide as the paisley motif. It can now be found all over the world, on stylish gowns and on punk T-shirts, on men's underwear and on Tanzanian kangas.

Anna Jackson, from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, writes about two remarkable 18th-century garments. One of them was made in Japan from a silk fabric originally produced in France; the other was made in Europe from a material produced in Japan. Contacts between Europe and Japan are also discussed by Ariane Fennetaux from Paris. On the basis of a garment now in the Fries Museum in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, she stresses the likelihood that India played an important role in the manufacture of 'Japanese' garments for the European market.

Dale Gluckman from Los Angeles writes about an Indonesian batik collection now in Bangkok, which was collected during three trips made by the Thai king Rama V to the former Dutch East Indies. He made a collection that is marked by its diversity and the information that was added to each piece. Niaz Zaman from Bangladesh and the Canadian filmmaker Cathy Stevulak report on the development of a typical textile product from Bangladesh and neighbouring West Bengal in India. This is the *kantha*, which has in recent years been given a new lease of life and is now used not only for the traditional quilts, but also for large wall hangings.

A paper by Nuning Y Damayanti Adisasmito from Bandung deals with the *Batik Kompeni*, a form of batik that developed in the 19th century from closer contacts between (mainly) Dutch entrepreneurs and local Indonesian craftsmen and women. These batiks include representations of Little Red Riding Hood, and storks standing in the middle of water plants.

Francesco Montuori from Italy, an intern at the TRC in Leiden, writes about a 'typical' Japanese garment from the post-war period, namely the *sukajan*, which is a garment that originates from the bomber jackets worn by American airmen stationed in Japan, and indirectly from the so-called letterman jackets that were worn since the mid-19th century by students at American universities. The *sukajan* became the characteristic garment of Japanese 'bad boys' in the 1950s and 1960s, and has since become a popular garment in Japan, which is often produced in China.

The final paper is by Caroline Stone from Cambridge, who presents a number of examples of decorative motifs sometimes very unexpectedly finding their way to other countries and continents. Compare in this context the traditional Moroccan woman's kaftan made from Japanese material originally produced for an *obi*, or kimono sash [fig. 2]. The examples show how concepts of 'static local tradition' and 'authenticity' are often hard to substantiate.

Willem Vogelsang served as Deputy Director of the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden from 2011-2020. [willemvogelsang@gmail.com](mailto:willemvogelsang@gmail.com)

# When motion blurs boundaries

Made in Vienna, made in Japan

Marie-Eve Celio-Scheurer

The Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection includes nearly 4,000 textiles, some one hundred sample and pattern books, and dye chemistry texts. What makes this collection so unusual is that the small textiles represent cultures throughout the world and date from antiquity to the present. It thus offers an encyclopedic overview of textiles, allowing close examinations and comparisons. It was not collected by a team of experts in different areas, but was brought together through the eyes of Lloyd Cotsen (1929-2017). Cotsen was interested in lesser-known forms of art and had a passion for Asian cultures and *Wiener Werkstätte* objects. The collection reflects cultural diversity and exchanges, and a common human creativity. Assembled between 1997 and 2017, it was donated to the George Washington University in 2018 and is kept today in the Cotsen Textile Traces Study Center at The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum in Washington D.C.

The Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection includes some distinct groups - among them the *Wiener Werkstätte* (Vienna Workshops) textiles. The *Wiener Werkstätte* (1903-1932) were a cooperative of artisans established in Vienna in 1903 by the architect Josef Hoffmann (1870-1956) and the painter Koloman Moser (1868-1918). Founded on the principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement, it is considered a key organisation in the development of modernism, anticipating the Bauhaus. With financial support from the textile industrialist Fritz Wärndorfer (1868-1939), the Workshops were expanded with a textile department (1909) and a fashion department (1911). The *Wiener Werkstätte* produced textiles characterised by bold patterns, designed by artists and students of the *Kunstgewerbeschule* (School of Applied Arts), where Hoffmann and Moser also taught.

The *Wiener Werkstätte* Textile Collection in Washington represents one of the most significant ensembles in a patrimonial institution outside Vienna. It includes more than 350 items, representing some fifty designers, and ranging from the 1910s to 1930, giving thus a good overview of the textile production by the *Wiener Werkstätte* from the beginning to the end. In this group, two textiles are especially intriguing because of their relation to Japan, and because they offer captivating examples of cross-cultural transfers.

The influence of Japanese art and design in Europe during the second half of the 19th century - after the reopening of trade of Japan in 1858 - is well known and generally called "Japonisme." What still needs to be more explored is how much European and Japanese cultures affected each other, especially at the time when Japanese men and women were coming to Europe and Europeans were going to Japan to study and teach, blurring the boundaries between these two cultures.

Moser and Hoffmann cited the significant influence of Japanese craft in their 1905 work-programme for the *Wiener Werkstätte*. While teaching at the *Kunstgewerbeschule*, both applied Japanese principles and exposed their students to various didactic resources, among which the technique of *katazome*, a Japanese dyeing method that uses a resist paste applied through stencils called *katagami*. This technique resulted in precise pattern designs, including that of bamboo. The *Museum für angewandte Kunst* (MAK or Museum of Applied Arts), with which the *Kunstgewerbeschule* was closely associated

This paper discusses two textiles from the Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection. What makes these two textiles fascinating is their link with Japan: one entitled "Japanland" by the *Wiener Werkstätte* artist Felice Rix Ueno (1893-1967) [fig.1]; the other, untitled and depicting bamboos, which had been attributed to the *Wiener Werkstätte* until 2015, when it was re-attributed to Japan [fig. 2].



Fig. 1 (left): Felice Rix-Ueno (1893-1967), *Japanland*, Vienna, 1923, silk, printed, 38 x 42 cm. Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection, T-1859, The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum. Bruce M. White Photography.

Fig. 2 (below): *Wiener Werkstätte* or Japanese sample, Vienna/Japan?, early 20th century, silk, satin weave, stenciled or printed, 17.5 x 15 cm. Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection, T-0193.270, The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum. Bruce M. White Photography.



holds a large collection of *katagami* stencils (~8,000). It was donated in 1907 by Heinrich Siebold (1852-1908), a German antiquary, collector, and translator in the service of the Austrian Embassy in Tokyo, to the *Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie* (Austrian Museum of Art and Industry), today the MAK.

The students and artists connected with the *Wiener Werkstätte* used these stencils and also created their own. This technique, even though less frequently used and less complex than the block printing technique, was in this way part of the production process of some of the *Wiener Werkstätte* textiles and reflects the impact of Japan. Unfortunately, due to their fragility, none of the stencils produced by the *Wiener Werkstätte* have survived, as far as we know, unlike the wooden blocks.

The fact that one of the *Wiener Werkstätte* textile designs is entitled "Japanland" and that bamboos were part of their repertoire does not come as a surprise. Nor does the use of stencils. But what makes these two textiles so interesting is that the first one was made by Felice Rix Ueno and reflects the exploration of

Japanese culture in Europe, while the second textile, depicting bamboos, is such a blend of two cultures that its origin is uncertain.

Felice Rix-Ueno, also called Lizzie, was born in Vienna on 1 June 1893. She was the eldest daughter of Julius Rix (1858-1927), a rich entrepreneur and temporary director of the *Wiener Werkstätte*, and Valérie Rix, née Löwy (1875-?). Between 1912 and 1917, she studied at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* in Vienna and

attended classes taught by Josef Hoffmann. On 21 October 1925, she married the Japanese architect Isaburo Ueno (1892-1972), who had graduated from Wasada University in 1922 and was hired at Hoffmann's architecture firm in Vienna. After their wedding, the couple moved to Japan, where Felice Rix-Ueno continued to create designs for the *Wiener Werkstätte* until 1930. Her marriage to Isaburo and move to Japan led her to lecture at the Kyoto City University of Arts, from which she resigned in 1963 to create, with her husband, their own private school, the Kyoto Interactive School of Art, expanding concepts she developed with the *Wiener Werkstätte*, and setting up teaching methods that were inspired by the Bauhaus, with an emphasis on individual imagination.

While working for the *Wiener Werkstätte*, she designed in several fields (illustrations, book covers, enamel works, etc.). Her major strength was in textile patterns, with a production of some 112 designs. Out of these, 69 were designed while she was in Vienna and date from 1913/17 to 1925, while the 43 remaining were created after she moved to Kyoto and date between 1926 and 1930.

We do not know if Felice Rix-Ueno visited Japan before her wedding, but what is certain is that her design entitled "Japanland" dates back to 1923, prior to her move to Japan, and depicts several *Japonisme* motifs: jagged mountains and pagodas, butterflies, stalks of flowers, fish in ponds, kimono-clad women with fans, and a man with a large fan seated in a rickshaw (*jinrikisha*). They are block printed in shades of brown, red, orange, green, blue, yellow, pink, and purple, on a black ground. The motifs follow the contemporary fashion and present a naive simplicity characteristic of her Vienna period, influenced by a taste for exoticism. The rich palette indicates a complex production, as each colour corresponds to a different block - a technique most often used, despite its complexity, for *Wiener Werkstätte* textiles. Her Kyoto period sees the development of more abstract motifs, with delicate lines and colours, testimony of a fusion of artistic traditions in Vienna and Kyoto.

The second textile, depicting bamboos [fig.2], was acquired by Mr. Cotsen in 1998, on the art market in Munich along with textile samples from the *Wiener Werkstätte*. It was attributed to this cooperative until 2015. Although it is close to the design called "Bergfalter" by Koloman Moser, it is no longer recognised as a *Wiener Werkstätte* pattern. Its similarities with Japanese *katagami* suggest that it could have been produced in Japan. The question remains open, and it testifies to how much the transfer and assimilation of cultures could result in a fusion, rendering the attribution of a textile sometimes very difficult.

Further research would allow for a better evaluation of the cross-cultural exchanges between Japan and Europe in the early 20th century. What these two textiles reveal is that, while the first textile clearly belongs to European *Japonisme*, the other one blurs the boundaries and suggests an assimilation and a fusion of two cultures, opening the door to new questions and investigations, not only on the transfer of motifs and techniques, but also on the impact of education through generations and cultures. How did the use of foreign resources, such as *katagami* stencils, influence motifs and techniques in European art? How did artists like Felice Rix-Ueno and her husband, through their education, art, and teaching, contribute to the transmission of knowledge at Hoffmann's studio and the development of Japanese modern art? These two textiles from the Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection leave us with the potential to discover new stories, testifying to exchanges, transfers, assimilation, and fusion between two different cultures.

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Fig. 1 (above): Fragment with confronted dragons, phoenixes, and wild beasts. China, Zhou dynasty, Warring States Period, radiocarbon dated 308–207 BCE. Silk; warp faced compound plain weave, 23.50 x 34.60 cm. Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection T-2537.



Fig. 2 (above): Fragments with auspicious animals, birds, flying immortals, clouds, and inscription *zhongguo dachang siyi fu le anding xing tianwu jiang* 中國大昌四夷服樂安定興天毋疆. China, Han dynasty, radiocarbon dated 127 BCE – 72 CE. Silk; warp-faced compound plain weave. Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection T-1215a-d.

Fig. 3 (right): Glove with cloud pattern. China, Han dynasty, radiocarbon dated 120 BCE – 90 CE. Silk; plain weave embroidered in chain stitch, 15.20 x 39.40 cm. Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection T-1483.



# Ancient and medieval Chinese textiles

In the Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection, Washington, D.C.

Lee Talbot

The Cotsen Textile Traces Study Center, a newly opened resource for textile scholarship at the George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum in Washington DC, houses nearly 4,000 small-scale textiles, many of them fragments. Created across the globe and dating from antiquity to the present day, these textiles are available for study in person and online.<sup>1</sup> The collection includes an important group of ancient and medieval Chinese textiles, with more than sixty fragments dating from the Zhou (ca. 1046–771 BCE) through the Han (206 BCE–220 CE) dynasties, and over one hundred examples woven from the end of the Han through the Tang (618–906) dynasty. This era witnessed the zenith of the so-called Silk Road, the network of trade routes linking China and the West. Chinese fragments in the collection illustrate how the movement of textiles through commerce and cross-cultural exchange influenced Chinese textile design and technology during this formative period.

Fig. 4 (below): Fragment with lions, peacocks, horses in roundels with inscription *ji xi* (lucky, auspicious). China, 6th – 8th century. Silk; warp-faced compound plain weave, 24.80 x 39.40 cm. Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection T-2729a.



The earliest fragments in the collection date to the Zhou dynasty. From the Zhou through the Han dynasties, the most prized textiles were patterned silks called *jin* (錦), which at the time were warp-faced compound plain weaves. In weaving *jin*, alternate picks separate the series of warp ends so that one shows on the face of the fabric, and the others remain on the reverse. The front surface is covered by warp floats, which hide the weft and create the pattern.

During the Zhou dynasty, *jin* typically featured geometric designs, but the finest

examples included bird and animal motifs. The example in Figure 1, radiocarbon dated to 308–207 BCE, is patterned with a lozenge-shaped cup and trees, paired phoenixes and birds, the sun and stars, confronted beasts, and a small band of dragons. While the dyes derived from plant sources do not survive well, the red pattern, created with the sulfide mineral cinnabar, remains vibrant. Silks woven with colourful designs were exceedingly costly symbols of wealth and high status at the time.

China alone possessed the secret of sericulture during the Zhou dynasty, but silks

were exchanged internationally along trade routes sometimes called the “Grassland Silk Road,” particularly active from the 5th to the 3rd centuries BCE. Chinese silks made their way across the Altai Mountains and over the Mongolian plateau into the steppes, as evidenced by Chinese fabrics excavated at archeological sites such as the Pazyryk tombs in Siberia.

The Han period saw the development of the westward, “desert-and-oasis” Silk Road, which carried Chinese textiles as far as the Roman Empire and Europe.



Fig. 5 (left): Fragment with floral medallion. China, 8th-9th century. Silk; weft-faced compound twill, 26.67 x 10.16 cm. Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection T-1803b.

Fig. 6 (below): Fragment with tiger and bird on a floral ground. China, Xinjiang, 13th century. Silk; tapestry weave, 26.7 x 26.7 cm. Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection T-1474.



Fig. 7 (right): Fragment with phoenixes and peonies. China, Yuan Dynasty (1271 - 1368). Silk; tapestry weave, 18 x 15 cm. Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection T-0833.



*Jin* remained one of the most prized fabrics, and improvements in silk weaving technology led to finer, more detailed designs. *Jin* production was largely under state control, and the state often presented these luxury goods as tokens of favour to individuals and neighbouring polities. The most typical Han *jìn* were patterned with clouds, animals, and inscriptions. While some *jìn* featured auspicious words and phrases, others bore inscriptions that referenced the receiver and their relationship to the imperial court. One such example depicts clouds, deer, and tigers along with the Chinese characters *enze* (恩澤, bounty, benefit received from above), a phrase that implied a special favour granted from the emperor or a high official.

As illustrated by the *jìn* in Figure 2, inscriptions can offer insight into the preoccupations of the imperial state and its relationship with its neighbours to the west. The Cotsen collection includes four fragments of a complicated *jìn* with clouds, a flying immortal, tigers, qilin, deer, rabbits, and the inscription *zhongguo dachang siyi fu le anding xing tianwu jiang* (中國大昌四夷服樂安定興天毋疆), which can be translated roughly as “China will prosper greatly, the four kinds of barbarians will be defeated, the people will be happy and safe, the glorious days will have no end.”

Clouds were perhaps the most widespread motifs on Han luxury textiles. Contemporaneous literature reveals that clouds were auspicious symbols associated with immortality. Perceived as exceedingly good omens, clouds were thought to serve as vehicles for the immortals. The well-preserved glove in Figure 3 features clouds rendered in embroidery, another highly prized textile patterning technique at the time. *Jin* and embroidery were so highly esteemed that the combination of these two words, *jìn xiù* (錦繡), came to refer to the best and finest of all things.

Luxury silks flowed into and out of China along the Silk Road. Textiles from the Central Asian region of Sogdiana, around present-day Uzbekistan, were particularly fashionable imports in China. Popular patterns on Sogdian silks, such as confronted animals in pearl-bordered roundels, eventually were incorporated into the Chinese design vocabulary. The ornament of the sixth- to eighth-century Chinese silk shown in Figure 4 shows clear influence from cultures to the west, with new motifs such as lions and peacocks arranged in a design format of pearl hexagons. The culture in China became quite cosmopolitan from the Han through the Tang dynasties, and large cities such as Chang’an and Luoyang were home to foreign traders and settlers who introduced new styles and skills. The text *Beishi* (北史), one of the official histories of the Northern Dynasties (386-581), relates the biography of He Chou (何稠), a third-generation member of a family that had immigrated from Central Asia, whom the emperor asked to make copies of Persian silks that were said to surpass the originals.<sup>2</sup>

Fabrics imported from the West influenced Chinese weaving techniques as well as textile design. Whereas earlier Chinese silks were warp-faced, during the Tang dynasty weft-faced compound twill, a structure originating in the West, became the favoured weave for Chinese luxury silks. The adoption of weft-faced patterning permitted weavers to create more complex designs, and to produce larger motifs and wider lengths of silk since this new technology allowed the expansion of loom width. As evidenced by the fragment in Figure 5, a new style emerged in the eighth century, featuring large floral medallions, often with floral devices in the interstices. Medallions of a central flower or cluster of flowers circled by rings of flowers became the most common motif on Chinese luxury silks of the eighth century and were widely used in other decorative arts. By the middle of the eighth century, floral medallions had largely replaced the Sogdian-style roundel patterns in popularity. Chinese textiles with floral medallions were widely exported and emulated throughout East Asia.

Another technique that arrived in China along the Silk Road was tapestry weave. The tapestry weave technique seems to have originated in ancient Mesopotamia and spread eastward over the centuries. The earliest tapestry weaves in Central Asia were made of wool, but by the Tang dynasty, weavers in this region were producing tapestry-woven textiles made of silk. Woven around the 13th century in eastern Central Asia (present-day western China), the example in Figure 6 features a blue tiger, gold bird, and multicoloured flower blossoms and leaves. The pattern reveals active international exchange, with stylistic influences from cultures to the east and west. Tapestry-woven silks made in Central Asia at this time often featured brightly coloured animal and floral motifs. During the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), workshops in China began to produce silks woven in the tapestry technique, typically patterned with animals and birds on a floral ground. The lack of precedent for this weave structure and ornamental scheme in China suggests that perhaps Uighurs from the west played a role in introducing the technique and patterning of silk tapestry.

International exchange intensified during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), when the Mongol empire spread from China all the way to eastern Europe. This political unification of disparate peoples facilitated international trade and cultural interchange. In their conquests, the Mongols typically spared the lives of skilled artisans such as weavers, and they relocated artists from many different regions to work together in administrative centres across the empire. Silks were traded extensively across Europe and Asia thanks to the expansion of international commerce under the Pax Mongolica. As evidenced by the fragment in Figure 7, showing phoenixes with five-plumed tails flying among peonies, birds and flower scrolls remained popular in the design of tapestry-woven silks. The bodies of the birds are woven in gold, with gold leaf applied to an animal skin substrate. Silks woven with gold yarns became particularly popular under the patronage of the previously nomadic Mongols, who valued textiles woven with precious silk and gold as a portable store of wealth.

Although small and fragmentary, the ancient and medieval Chinese silks in the Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection provide a valuable resource for scholarship. These fabrics document many of the main techniques and motifs used in the manufacture of Chinese luxury textiles over a long period of time, and their study illuminates formative aesthetic and technical developments arising from trade and cross-cultural exchange along the Silk Road.

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#### Notes

- <https://museum.gwu.edu/cotsen-textile-traces-study-collection>
- <http://chinesenotes.com/suishu/suishu068.html#?highlight=>

#### Suggested reading

- Kuhn, Dieter, editor. *Chinese Silks*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012.
- Wardwell, Anne E. and James C.Y. Watt. *When Silk Was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997.
- Zhao, Feng. *Chinese Silk and the Silk Road*. Montreal: Royal Collins Publishing Company, 2020.
- Zhao, Feng. *Treasures in Silk*. Hong Kong: ISAT/Costume Squad, 1999.



1.



2.



4.



3.



5.

Fig. 1: Embroidered appliqué buteh motif in gold thread work on a dark red velvet ground (with fake dark red 'rubies'). India, 20th century. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2020.5154).

Fig. 2: Wooden printing block for chikan work from Lucknow, with buteh motifs, India, early 21st century. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2017.2672).

Fig. 3: Wrap-around cloth (kanga) with paisley motifs, Tanzania, 1960s. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2014.0929).

Fig. 4: Detail of a woven woollen paisley shawl, with large paisley motif, mid-19th century. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2019.2029).

Fig. 5: Woman's black shawl with printed paisley motifs, Russia, early 21st century. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2019.2692).

# From *buteh* to paisley: the story of a global motif

Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood

The buteh or paisley motif is actually one of the few non-geometric design forms that can be found throughout the world. It is worn by men, women and children of all ages, literally from the cradle to the grave. Moreover, it is worn by people of many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This contribution presents an overview

## History of the Paisley Motif

There are various theories about the early history of the paisley motif, and it would appear that it originated in Iran during the early first millennium AD. At this date it was a bulbous, almond shaped form, which was often flowery and without the prominent hook so common in later examples. This motif is specifically known as a buteh. The end of the 17th century saw the hooked buteh becoming a popular motif in neighbouring Mughal India (c. 1526-1857). It was used especially on the fine woollen shawls that were hand woven and sometimes embroidered in Kashmir in northern India.

The motif travelled from India to Africa, Southeast and East Asia, but in particular to Europe. In the late eighteenth century, the buteh became even more popular as it was featured on the Kashmir shawls that were being exported in vast quantities to Europe. Joséphine de Beauharnais, wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, for example, is said to have owned over 200 of these shawls.

## South and Southwest Asia

The use of the buteh motif started in Iran and spread to India, so it is not surprising that it remained so popular in these and neighbouring countries. There are numerous examples of 19th-century Qajar paintings from Iran, for instance, which include depictions of members of the various royal courts wearing garments with the buteh motif. In addition, household items such as prayer mats, wall hangings, and towels were often decorated with the buteh.

By the end of the 20th century, buteh remained a popular motif and was used for both urban and regional clothing in Iran and India [fig. 2]. It was used among urban, village, and nomadic groups for both men's and women's clothing, including headwear, saris, and a variety of shawls and head coverings.

The buteh motif can also be found in Afghanistan and Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan – again, it was, and still is, popular for both men's and women's clothing. In particular, it was used for headwear and items such as jackets and coats.

## Southeast Asia

The paisley motif appears to have arrived in East and Southeast Asia by at least the 19th century and came mainly via Indian textiles. It has remained a feature of various East and Southeast Asian countries, notably Japan and Indonesia.

The paisley motif has been popular in Japan for at least two hundred years. It appears to have been introduced by European and Indian merchants, especially those dealing in textiles and garments. It is regarded by the Japanese as being a typically British or Scottish pattern. By the end of the 20th century the paisley motif was used for a variety of garments, including the kimono and obi (sash). In some cases, the motifs are small and discreet; on other cases, they may be large, ornate forms.

For several hundred years, the buteh motif has been a popular form in Indonesia, especially in Java. It can be found on batiks and take on ornate forms. In Indonesia, the buteh has become very popular among the Indian community. With the resurgence of

We all know the motif: that cone-shaped, curvy form which is so pleasant to look at and feels so peaceful [fig. 1]. The eye is taken from the side to the top and down again, all with a feeling of balance. It is so well-known that it is generally accepted as just being one of those patterns that have always been there.

Islam in the early 21st century, wearing the buteh motif declined as it was seen as a typically Hindu motif, although, ironically, it originally derived from Iran, a Muslim country.

## Turkey and the Middle East

The paisley motif can be found in both Turkey and the Middle East. It was popular in Turkey during the 19th century and later, and it has survived in various parts of the country as part of regional dress, notably as decoration on headscarves and the resist-dyed aprons of eastern Anatolia.

In contrast to many other regions, the motif does not appear to have been so popular in the Arab Middle East, where it is sometimes simply called buteh. This minimal use of the motif may be due to a preference for geometric, rather than 'organic' designs. The paisley motif occurs mainly in areas where there was a strong European influence, such as in Algeria, Egypt, and Lebanon, which had access to imported European materials, ribbons, and bands.

Fig. 6: Square cloth (worteldoek) from the Netherlands, with paisley motifs, mid-20th century. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2019.2238).



Fig. 7: Woven and printed chest panel (baaf or bouw) with paisley motifs for a woman from the Dutch island of Marken, 20th century. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2017.0946).



Fig. 8: Woven and printed scarf with paisley motifs from the island of Rätik, Estonia, 2021. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2021.0408d).

Fig. 9: Woven corset made in China for the British market, for the Steam Punk group, with paisley motifs, 2020. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2020.3832).



Fig. 10: T-shirt made in Bangladesh for the British punk market, with the depiction of a skull filled with paisley motifs, 2020. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2020.4204).



## Africa

The paisley motif can be found on a variety of West and East African objects, including the wrap-around garments for women known as *kanga* from East Africa [fig. 3], and printed women's headwear in West Africa. Many of these pieces used to be made in Europe and western India for the local markets, but more and more are being made in Tanzania and China.

In West Africa the situation is more complicated, as by the end of the 20th century, many textiles were designed and made in China for various markets in Africa. Sometimes these textiles have a mixed Chinese/African feel to the designs. As a result, sometimes the paisley motif can take on a Chinese yin-yang design.

## Kashmir and European Paisley Shawls

By the beginning of the 19th century, Kashmir-style shawls started to be copied on handlooms and later on mechanical looms – especially the Jacquard loom in France and Britain, although the Europeans never managed to mechanically reproduce the striking number of colour combinations of the 'original' Kashmir shawls.

Paisley, which lies just south of Glasgow, became particularly noted for the production of 'Kashmir' shawls. For the next 70 years,

it was an important producer of shawls for domestic and export purposes. By 1850, for example, there were over 7,000 weavers producing shawls [fig. 4]. In addition, other versions of the Kashmir shawl were being woven in Paisley and elsewhere in northern Europe that consisted of different pieces of the shawl being woven on machines and then stitched together.

The high demand for these fashion accessories and fabrics resulted in other forms of the 'mass-produced' shawls being developed, such as embroidered versions and very cheap examples that were printed. Mass production globally popularized the *buteh* under the name of paisley. As a result, for most people in the West, and indeed elsewhere, it has remained the paisley motif. In addition, the motif began to appear on other garments, such as women's bodices, jackets, and skirts.

The popularity of the paisley shawl started to decline in the 1870's, following a change in fashion (especially the advent of the bustle, which meant that the shawls could not be draped to their best advantage). At the same time, shawls came to be seen as too popular and 'common.'

## Paisley and European Regional Textiles and Dress

Given the popularity of the motif, it is not surprising that it can be found on various

forms of European regional dress. It occurs on Russian head coverings and shawls for the *babushka* ('grannies') [fig. 5], and on garments and textiles in Scandinavia, Germany, and the Netherlands [fig. 6]. It is a popular motif among the clothes worn by women on the Dutch island of Marken, where it occurs on both children's and women's garments [fig. 7]. Paisley motifs can also be found on some women's bodices from Staphorst, also in the Netherlands. The motif features prominently among the regional dress of the island of Kihnu in Estonia [fig. 8]. It is used for aprons, jackets, and headscarves worn by women. Much of the cloth used to make these garments comes from Russia.

## Is Paisley Out of Fashion?

Famous figures such as Chuck Berry, Cliff Richard, and David Bowie have worn paisley, while designers and designer firms, such as Yves Saint Laurent, Burberry, Gucci, and Dolce & Gabbana, as well as well-known textile groups such as Liberty's of London, have all produced ranges of paisley fabrics.

In Italy during the 1950's and 1960's, the Italian designer Emilio Pucci created a successful print called *cachemire siciliano*, which mixed symbols of Sicily with the paisley motif. In addition, in the 1980s the Italian fashion brand ETRO made the paisley

pattern into its iconic motif and it remains widely used by them to the present day, especially in Italian prêt-à-porter.

Steampunk is a 'retro-futuristic' fictional genre and form of cult clothing that developed in the late 1980s. It is based on the concept of 19th-century industrial and steam-powered technology, mixed in with modern science fiction and horror. The associated fashion scene is a mixture of 19th-century retro-fashion and fantasy. Not surprisingly, paisley is a popular motif of this group and is worn by both men and women [figs. 9 and 10].

Finally, the front cover of a recent issue of *Vanity Fair* (March 2021) depicted a model wearing paisley, and the recent Dior (Spring 2021) fashion show also featured many models in garments embellished with the paisley motif.

To answer the question above: no, for the last two hundred years, this originally Iranian /Indian motif has never gone out of fashion, and is not likely to vanish in the near future.

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# A tale of two silks

Anna Jackson

The Victoria and Albert Museum in London has one of the most significant collections of Japanese textiles and dress in Europe. One recent acquisition is an Edo-period (1615-1868) outer kimono (*uchikake*) [fig. 1]. What makes the garment so unusual is that it is made from silk brocade woven in Lyon in the mid-18th century. Such fabric was typically used to make suits for stylish and wealthy European men. Instead, this silk found its way to Japan, where it was made into a kimono for a high-ranking woman from Japan's ruling military (*samurai*) class.

Lyon was the main centre for silk weaving in France from the late 17th century, and here Europe's most fashionable fabrics were designed and manufactured. The marketing and distribution of Lyonnais silk was carried out by *commissionaires* who would travel widely through Europe, carrying samples with which to demonstrate both the high quality and the innovative designs of the forthcoming seasonal collections. As socially adept as they were commercially skilled, these dedicated salesmen would cultivate a rich clientele in major cities such as Amsterdam. It was presumably here that an order was placed for a roll of silk with a small-scale pattern in blue, pink, yellow, and black on a white ground, perhaps by a leading member of the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* or VOC) [fig. 2]. Whether the silk was originally purchased to tailor domestic garments or specifically to take to Asia is not known, but such an expensive item would certainly not have been left unused. So, soon after its creation in Lyon, it was placed on a VOC ship bound for Japan.

Japan severely restricted foreign trade and relations during most of the Edo period. The Dutch were, however, permitted to maintain a trading base on Dejima, a small artificial island in Nagasaki harbour. Their movements and activities were heavily constrained, but the Dutch were accorded the honour of regular audiences with the *shōgun*. Once a year, the VOC chief, secretary, and physician would make the long journey to Edo to pay their respects, present gifts, and give thanks for the continuation of trade. Cloth was a major commercial commodity as well as an important article of diplomatic exchange, and the fabrics the Dutch brought to Japan aroused great interest. In the 17th century, Chinese and Bengali silks pre-dominated, but there was then a major shift to cottons from South and Southeast Asia. The latter became highly fashionable and there are a number of extant kimono made from imported cotton. The V&A's *uchikake* is, as yet, the only known Edo-period garment to be made from European silk. Given its high quality, the fabric was certainly a diplomatic gift. Testimony from the private collector who donated the kimono to the museum revealed that the garment had probably belonged to the wife of the Nabeshima *daimyō*, who ruled the Saga domain in south-east Japan. The domain was largely responsible for the military defence of nearby Nagasaki. It also had strong links with Dutch trade: the export porcelain centre of Arita and the port of Imari, from which the pottery was shipped, were both located in Saga. The Dutch party also passed through Hizen, the castle town, on their journey to Edo. It is not known whether the French fabric was a gift that resulted from this close connection or whether it came to Nabeshima via the shogunate, nor indeed when it was made into a garment. What is clear is that wearing a kimono of such rare and exotic cloth would have been an indicator of both status and style.

The *uchikake* was featured in the V&A exhibition *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk*, staged in 2020, in the section that explored the sartorial interaction between Japan and Europe in the Edo period [fig. 3]. Also displayed was a recently discovered robe of Japanese indigo-dyed plain weave silk (*habutae*) worn in Britain in the early 18th century [fig. 4].



Fig 1 (left): Outer kimono for a woman (*uchikake*). Fabric woven in Lyon, France, 1750–70; tailored in Japan, 1750–1850. Brocade silk. Given by Yoshida Kōjirō. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

Fig 2 (below): Detail of outer kimono for a woman (*uchikake*). Given by Yoshida Kōjirō. © Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig 3 (above): 'Fashion for the Foreign' display in *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk*, V&A 2020 © Victoria and Albert Museum.

Fig 4 (right): Night gown (*Japōne Rock*), Japan, 1700–20. Plain weave silk, stencil dyeing (*katayome*). © National Trust for Scotland, Newhailes.

Fig 5 (far right): Detail of Night gown (*Japōne Rock*). © National Trust for Scotland, Newhailes.



Just as the Dutch gifted cloth, they were presented with kimono. Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716), doctor at the VOC base in Dejima from 1690-1692, recorded the garments that the Dutch received when they travelled to Edo. On his second visit to the capital, Kaempfer reported that "on the 25th of April, we had 10 fine gowns sent to us by Bingo, 5 as good as any wove with flowers, by the young Prince of Firando [Hirado], ... and a couple of sorry ones by the second Governor of Jedo [Edo]." Together with those given by the *shōgun*, Kaempfer noted that a total of 123 garments were received on this occasion. The Dutch shipped the kimono they received to the VOC headquarters in Batavia, and from there to the Netherlands, where they fetched high prices at the East India Company's auctions.

A style of loose robe was already part of the European wardrobe, being worn for informal gatherings or to provide extra warmth for the scholar in his library. However, the arrival of Japanese silk garments with their colourful patterning and lightweight wadding between exterior fabric and lining caused a great stir. To capitalise on the vogue, the Dutch began to commission a particular style of kimono from Japanese makers which had modified, more tubular sleeves and a thick silk wadding. For someone living in the chilly environs of northern Europe these *Japōne Rock*, as they were known, were wonderfully warm as well as luxurious and fashionable. They are mostly associated with male dress but were also worn by women.

Only a few of the Japan-made garments survive, and most are in the Netherlands. Recently, however, one has been found in the collection of Newhailes House near Edinburgh, the home of the Dalrymple family. It is reputed to have belonged to Sir James Dalrymple (1692-1751), who was a Member of Parliament and Auditor General of the Exchequer. He and his wife travelled in Europe, including the Low Countries, and had a taste for Chinese and Japanese ceramics, Chinese textiles, and Chinese wallpaper. It is likely that the robe was acquired in the Netherlands.

Such garments were known as night gowns in Britain. They were not worn in bed, but informally at home. It was perfectly respectable to receive your guests, and even to have your portrait painted, while wearing one. Indeed, such apparel signified your wealth and cosmopolitan taste. In the Newhailes robe, the length of the collar and the way it is attached, the front overlap (*okumi*), and the red lining reveal its Japanese origin. The pattern on the exterior is of Japanese parsley created with a stencil paste-resist dyeing technique (*katayome*). Parsley is known as one of the Seven Spring Herbs and was an auspicious symbol that marked the first month of the lunar calendar. Such a reference would have been lost on the Scottish owner of the robe, who no doubt simply enjoyed the unusual pattern as much as the samurai woman did the design of the Lyonnais silk. A unique feature of the Newhailes robe is the family crest (*mon*) similar to those seen on formal Japanese kimono [fig. 5]. This crest is not one used in Japan, however, and was probably invented just for export. It is tempting to link the garment with the 'Japanese habutae silk kimono with family crests' noted in the registers of the *Tōban kamotsuchō* [*Cargo List of Chinese and European Ships*] as being loaded on to a Dutch ship on the 21st of the ninth month of Shotoku 1 (1711).

Hopefully, further research can uncover more about the history of these fascinating examples of cross-cultural exchange. What this tale of two silks certainly does reveal is the way in which fashion can transcend borders and, through a process of translation and assimilation, serve to blur boundaries between the foreign and the familiar.

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# Shōchikubai on the Coromandel

## Textiles, techniques and trends in transit

Ariane Fennetaux

The terms used in Europe for this type of garment – ‘Cambay’ or *Japonsche Rock* in Dutch, ‘India Gown’ or ‘Banyan’ in English, or ‘Indienne’ and ‘robe d’Arménien’ in French – reflect the trade networks from which the style resulted. As a garment type, the European night gown neatly encapsulates the complex, multi-polar networks of exchange and influence that were characteristic of the ‘interwoven globe’ in the early modern period.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas at first sight the Fries Museum night gown seems to result from a neat pattern of circulation between three distinct geographical areas – Europe, India, and Japan – linked together by the arrival in Asia of European trading companies, close study of the garment shows various and pre-existing multi-layered patterns of appropriation.

Kimono first arrived in Europe as gifts from the shōgun and various officials to the Dutch factors when they were allowed, once a year, to go to Edo and ask for trading rights to be renewed. However, the gown in the Fries Museum is not a Japanese garment, not even one altered to suit European tastes. The back of the garment is made in one piece, a detail that is characteristically not Japanese. Crucial to the symbolics of the kimono is the central back seam (背縫い or *senui*), which was thought to offer protection to a vulnerable part of the body. Even when the fabric was wide enough to be used uncut at the back – for instance, when made out of Indian cotton which could come in larger widths than the traditional silks – a pleat would still be made in the middle to replicate the traditional back seam.

Most strikingly, the gown was not made from yards of painted cotton cut and assembled into a garment. The motif was applied to shape or ‘à disposition,’ something we can infer from the decorative borders of the garment and from the upward direction of the pattern on both front and back, even though the front and the back were made from one piece of fabric without a shoulder seam. This means that the garment was made from fabric that received its motif specifically to be made into this type of dress.

Closer scrutiny of some of the seams also shows that the pattern was painted onto the garment after assembly. The stitches used to assemble the garment reveal that the thread used took on the red dye (probably chay root), while the inside of the seams remained uncoloured, which shows that the seam existed when the partly assembled garment received its colour. This technique of applying decoration post-assembly is visible in other chintz night gowns made on the Coromandel coast and may have been a widespread practice. The many references to ready-made night gowns in European capitals such as Amsterdam have usually been interpreted as an early sign of the advent of ready-made production in the West. Our evidence suggests that India produced ready-made or partly ready-made gowns for export from the end of the 17th century.<sup>3</sup>

A later gown is an example of a partly ready-made kit. Its sides remain unsewn and its sleeves detached, ready to be assembled.<sup>4</sup> A comment in the VOC-archives shows that Japanese-looking gowns such as the example in the Fries Museum could be produced in bulk for the European market. When the Dutch commissioner General Van Rheede visited the Coromandel coast in 1689, he sent six chintz gowns “in the Japanese style” from the Coromandel to the Netherlands, noting that he could have a thousand made the following year.<sup>5</sup> Although we cannot be sure they are related to the note, there are actually four surviving shōchikubai chintz gowns.<sup>6</sup>

The Fries Museum in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, holds a late 17th-century chintz night gown [fig. 1].<sup>1</sup> The gown uses distinctive Indian technologies of mordanted fast-colour painting and dyeing, and features the traditional Japanese motif of pine, plum blossom, and bamboo, known as *shōchikubai* [松竹梅]. While its design is apparently inspired by the Japanese kimono, detailed analysis shows that this garment was made for European rather than Japanese consumption. With a palampore-style tree on the back, a vibrant red *shōchikubai* motif, and a front that bears some resemblance with Japanese kimono, the gown is a culturally hybrid garment.



Fig. 1: Man's night gown with *shōchikubai* motif, India c. 1700, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, inv. : T.2016-038. © with kind permission from the Fries Museum, Leeuwarden.

If we are to believe European observers, Indian calico artisans were working from musters “lying at their sides” which they “imitate [...] so that it has a complete likeness.”<sup>7</sup> We know models were sent from Europe for copying and that artists were delegated to India by the VOC to create textile designs.<sup>8</sup> Several European prints have been suggested as possible sources for the *shōchikubai* chintz gowns. However, if we observe how the painted motifs imitate the traditional tie-and-dye technique of *kanoko shibori* (鹿の子絞), it seems more likely that Indian artisans had direct access to actual Japanese textiles. This technique, which creates small diaper patterns and was sometimes used to represent pine boughs on Edo-period kimono, is indigenous to Japan and specific to textile.

Moreover, the Fries Museum gown does not include bamboo. The painted flowers, which are depicted on leaf-bearing branches and with slighted indented petals, also resemble cherry rather than the plum blossoms associated with *shōchikubai*. Clearly, if the Japanese motif was copied, it was not done in any slavish way, but was substantially adapted by the Indian artisans who used their own technical and aesthetic vocabulary. Another aesthetic influence may be seen in the pine at the back. It grows from a mound that closely echoes the stylised rockery used on Indian palampores, which, as we know, were themselves a cross-cultural design bringing together Europe, India, and China.<sup>9</sup>

In the 16th century, the Mughal emperor Akbar (1542-1605) actively encouraged Turkish, European, Armenian, and Persian migrants to settle in India and become involved in textile production. Early modern India was awash with a variety of technical

and aesthetic influences, through the movement of goods and people across the country. The Persian influence in particular is ever-present in the world of Indian cotton, as evidenced by textile terminology, where Persian terms abound, starting with the word *kalam*, the name given to the distinctive pen used to paint on cotton. And if the kimono is often cited as the origin of the fashion for loose night gowns in Europe, the influence of the caftan or the Arab and Persian *qaba* is also essential. Both were worn across the Middle East and beyond, sometimes by diasporic populations present in India and actively involved in trade, long before Europe's involvement in Eurasian or inter-Asian mercantile contacts.<sup>10</sup> The gown in the Fries Museum may have been made for European consumption, but it was the result of combined influences, many of which long predated the VOC or other East India Companies.

To conclude, let us return to the Japanese element of this story. Contrary to what Eurocentric discussions of fashion history suggest, the kimono was not an unchanging garment emblematic of a ‘fashionless’ society.<sup>11</sup> Japan was a highly fashion-conscious country. Decades before Europe had a fashion press, dozens of pattern books were published in Japan showing subtle variations in patterns and taste. Towards the end of the 17th century, for instance, the panels forming the collar and wrap over front (*okumi* and *eri*) which also created the distinctive indented line of the front had changed shape and proportion, becoming much shorter and narrower. With the square indentation of its front almost at hem level, the Fries Museum gown thus seems to have been modelled after a garment that, by that time, was distinctively old-fashioned in Japan itself. The Japanese might have been

getting rid of undesirable old stock when they gifted kimono to Europeans – who probably knew no better.

This further reverses the vision of Europeans single-handedly orchestrating global material circulations. Not only do the resulting gowns testify to much more complex trade networks and a longer chronology than that defined by Europe's involvement in Asian trade, but they also illustrate Europeans' relative subsidiary position in Asia – in India as much as in Japan.

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### Notes

- 1 Leeuwarden, Fries Museum, inv. : T.2016-038. A much longer version of this paper is to be published as Ariane Fennetaux, ‘Behind the Seams. Global Circulations in a Group of Japanese-Inspired Cotton Nightgowns c. 1700’, *Textile History*, forthcoming 2021. I would like to thank Gieneke Arnoli and Eveline Holsappel, curators at the Fries Museum for their kind help and support.
- 2 The phrase is borrowed from Amanda Peck, *Interwoven Globe. The Worldwide Textile Trade 1500-1800* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013).
- 3 Ariane Fennetaux, ‘“Indian Gowns Small and Great”: Chintz Banyans Ready Made in the Coromandel 1680-1780’, *Costume* 55, no. 1 (2021): 49-73.
- 4 Peabody Essex Museum, PEM, inv. no. 2012.22-21abc.
- 5 Cited in Marghareta Breukink-Peeze, ‘Japanese Robes, a Craze’, in *Imitation and Inspiration: Japanese Influence on Dutch Art*, ed. Stefan van Raay (Amsterdam: Art Unlimited Books, 1989), 56.
- 6 The other three are in Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, inv. 959.12; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. BK-1980-99 and Palais Galliera Paris, inv. 1920.1.2039.
- 7 Daniel Havart, *Op- en Ondergang van Cormandel, of Cormandel in Zijn Binnenste Geheel Open Gestelt* (Amsterdam: Jan ten Hoorn, 1689), vol. 3, p.13. Cited in John Irwin, ‘Origins of the “Oriental Style” in English Decorative Art’, *Burlington Magazine* 97, 625 (1955), p. 110.
- 8 On artists being sent to India by the VOC see Heleen B. van der Weel, ‘In Die Kunst En Wetenschap Gebruickt’. *Gerrit Claeszoon Clink (1646-1693), Meester Kunstschilder van Delft En Koopman in Dienst van de Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2002).
- 9 Katherine B. Brett, ‘The Flowering Tree in Indian Chintz’, *Journal of Indian Textile History* 3 (1957), pp. 45-57.
- 10 Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony. The World System AD 1250-1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 13.
- 11 Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme XVe-XVIIIe siècle: Les Structures du quotidien* (Paris: Armand Collin, 1967), pp. 271-72.



Fig.1 (left): Portrait of HM King Chulalongkorn, 1896. Studio of Robert Lenz, Singapore. The Royal yacht stopped in British Singapore on both the outbound and return journeys of each of the king's three trips to Java. Photo courtesy of the National Archives of Thailand.

Fig. 2 (right): Attributed to the workshop of Carolina Josephina von Franquemont, Semarang, Java. Sarung (sewn). Hand-drawn wax resist, brush-and-vat-dyed on plain weave cotton. 109.3 x 104 cm. Bureau of the Royal Household, Inv. #18. Photo courtesy of the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, Bangkok.



# Unexpected Consequences

## The Javanese batik collection of Thailand's King Rama V (r. 1868-1910)

Dale Carolyn Gluckman<sup>1</sup>

The Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles (QSMT) opened in Bangkok on the grounds of the Grand Palace in 2012. The museum is housed in an 1870s building by an Italian architect. It had been unoccupied for several decades when it was granted to Her Majesty Queen Sirikit in 2004 by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej (r. 1947-2016) for the creation of a state-of-the-art textile museum.

It was in 2009, during the course of seeking inspiration for the opening exhibitions, that the curatorial team was permitted access to the inner court of the Grand Palace. Textiles and clothing belonging to King Rama V had sat in locked storage there, undisturbed since his passing in 1910. During the course of looking at a variety of Thai court textiles and a few Indian saris from two of the king's short visits to India, suddenly Javanese batik sarongs were placed on our worktable. Why were Javanese batiks in the Grand Palace in Bangkok? We learned that King Rama V had traveled to Java in 1871, 1896, and 1901. Since 1910, however, no one outside of two or three Palace intimates had ever seen the collection.

Time, war, and the environment are often hard on objects as fragile as textiles. As a result, although there are examples of Javanese batik dating before the dawn of the 20th century, they are relatively rare and many have little or no documentation regarding

their date and circumstances of production. This was an important find for the history of Thailand and Thai-Indonesian relations as well as for the study of Indonesian batik. Accordingly, those present at this rediscovery were encouraged to remember the collection for a future exhibition and publication.

Like the museum itself, the batik project was an international team effort requiring years of planning and research. In October 2018, our collective dream became reality with the opening of the exhibition, *A Royal Treasure: The Javanese Batik Collection of King Chulalongkorn of Siam*.<sup>2</sup> This short essay presents highlights both of the collection and significant discoveries made along the way, as well as a brief outline of the king's travels in Java.

King Chulalongkorn was dedicated to keeping Siam independent of colonial domination, as well as modernising the country. Visiting Singapore and Java,

therefore, was a way to see recent innovations such as streetcars and railroads the Dutch and English were bringing to their colonies. The visit was also intended to impress upon Europeans that the king was, in fact, a legitimate head of state, not a local chieftain, and an educated, English-speaking, progressive monarch in his own right [fig. 1].

Primary sources for the king's visits are his personal diaries of the 1896 and 1901 trips; expense accounts of the second visit – including batik purchases; a hand-written English translation of descriptions of the 1896 visit in local Dutch newspapers on Java (made for the king, who could read English but not Dutch). In addition, there are photographs from the 1896 and 1901 visits, as well as hand-written inventory cards in Thai and English accompanying many pieces in the collection.

### An official visit: 9 March-15 April 1871

No photographs are extant from this brief, 11-day visit of the 17-year-old king. We do know that he rode a tram in Batavia (modern Jakarta) – a great novelty – and stopped in only one other city, Semarang. There, at a local official's home, the king witnessed “the dyeing and printing of sarongs and benevolently accepted a finished sarong.”<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, it was impossible to identify this piece in the surviving collection – if it still exists.

Five pieces in the collection, however, came from a famous batik workshop owned by Carolina Josephina von Franquemont (1817-1867), the earliest known Eurasian female entrepreneur. Her pieces are distinctive and were highly prized for decades after her workshop was destroyed in 1867 by a volcanic eruption in which she is believed to have perished. The sarongs (hip wrappers) attributed

to her workshop in the collection all have their ends sewn together, indicating they had already been worn when acquired; sarongs purchased new would be unsewn. It could not be determined how the King acquired these pieces and whether it was on the first trip or a later one. But they are among the rarest pieces in any batik collection. Note the rich green dye, for which von Franquemont was famous [fig. 2].

### A private journey, 9 May - 12 August 1896

Although this was a ‘private’ visit for the king's health, it was avidly followed by the local Dutch-language press, and he was greeted by both Colonial and Javanese officials throughout his time there. The Sultan of Yogyakarta, HRH Hamengkubowono VII (r. 1879-1921), assigned the first professional Javanese photographer, Kassian Céphas, to photograph the royal party during their entire visit [fig. 3].<sup>4</sup>

It was on this visit that His Majesty's interest in Javanese art and culture, particularly batik, is most evident: the king's diaries mention visiting batik workshops and local markets and purchasing from itinerant sellers. For example: “Went to the residence of the Raden Adipati [in Garut] and saw the sarong production process [batik] and I tried my hand at it.”<sup>5</sup>

Possibly the most important workshop visited by the king was on 3 July: “In the afternoon, I went to see kain making at the Western woman's house ... there are 100 workers ... This workshop is one of the best in the city except for the keraton (palace) ... each finished piece was sold for 25 guilders.”<sup>6</sup> Ultimately the king bought at least 41 pieces from this workshop (which he visited again in 1901).



Fig. 3: HM King Chulalongkorn and HRH Susuhunan Pakubuwono X (r.1893-1939) arm-in-arm in the Keraton of Surakarta, Java, 6 July 1896. Photo courtesy of the National Archives of Thailand

Accompanying the collection are inventory cards handwritten in Thai and English with such information as place of purchase, function (a head cloth or sarong, for example), the name of the pattern, and the price in Dutch guilders [fig. 4a]. This practice probably began in 1896, when the bulk of the collection was purchased. These alone are rare survivals, seldom, if ever, available for historical textiles. But pieces of lined note paper in a different, classic European hand accompanied many of those cards, reading “W. v Lawick v Pabst” [fig. 4b]. This author’s research revealed that they were “signature papers” used by Indo-European batik entrepreneurs before 1900, when waxed signatures on the cloth itself

became the norm. Nowhere, however, has an example of one of these papers been published until now.

But who was this person, whose name was mentioned only once in the literature? Author Sandra Niessen did an outstanding job identifying the fascinating story behind those initials: Wilhelmina Fredericka van Lawick van Pabst was, in fact, two women with the same name, a mother (1827-1905) and a daughter (1856-1909), who produced some of the finest batik in Central Java. They were members of a famous aristocratic family with deep roots in the Indies and high-level connections in both Java and the Netherlands. Despite the fame of their production from the latter half of the

19th century to the death of the daughter in 1909, as well as the existence of batik process and pattern samples from the Dutch East Indies pavilion of the 1900 Paris Exposition Internationale (now in the collection of the Tropenmuseum),<sup>8</sup> the workshop and its owners were all but forgotten by the mid-20th century [fig. 5].<sup>9</sup>

**For His Majesty’s health,  
5 March - 24 July 1901**

During this third and last trip, one of the king’s sons, Prince Asadang, became ill in Bandung. As a result, the king and queen

stayed with their son for over a month. The king’s diaries tell us that on a rainy 12 June, he requested that the “batik seller from Pekalongan” be summoned to the hotel. It should be noted that Bandung at this time was considered the “Paris of Java,” with a large foreign population and establishments selling fashionable batiks, many made in towns along the north coast of the island.

There are eight pieces in the collection from the workshop of the famous batik entrepreneur, Mrs. J. Jans, based in Pekalongan. They were almost certainly purchased on 12 June. One piece [fig. 6a and 6b] is signed “Wed. Jans” (weduwe, “widow”), a signature that she seems to have used from 1885 when her husband died until around 1900, as it is the only one with this signature in the group purchased by the king; the other pieces of hers are simply signed “J. Jans” or unsigned. There is also an Art Nouveau feel to the somewhat trapezoidal transverse panel which would have been very “Avant Garde” in 1901. Her pieces were expensive and fashionable, her clients the wives of Dutch officials, either Dutch (as was she) or Indo-European (their status as wives of those officials entitled them to identify as Dutch). The feminine colours and motifs of her sarong would have made them perfect for at-home wear. The clean white or cream backgrounds and predominately floral patterns echoed Dutch printed cottons (inspired by the famous Indian chintzes made for the European market), while the romantic lacey border designs were similar to the lace trim worn by European women in that era.

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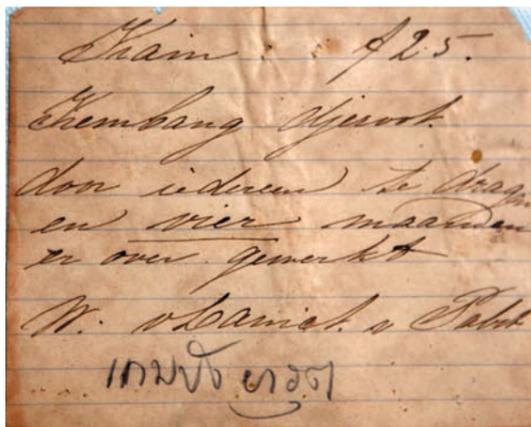
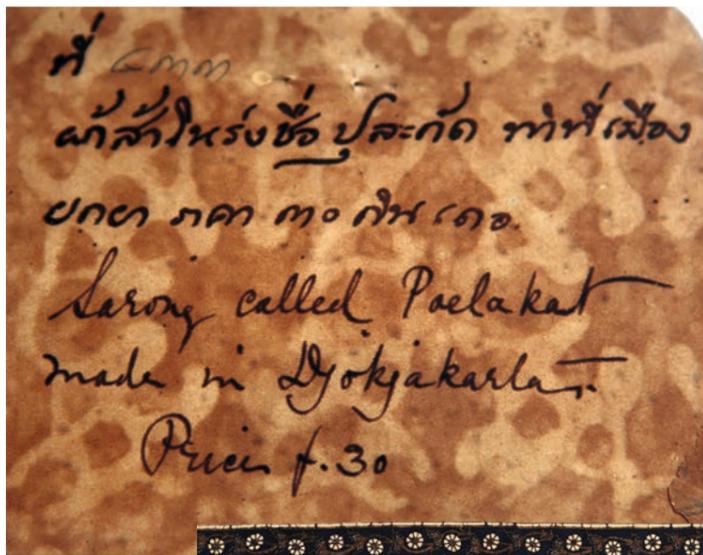


Fig. 4a (above left): An example of the many inventory cards with the collection. Written in Thai and English it gives the name of the pattern, the place the piece was made, and the price in guilders. Photo courtesy of the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, Bangkok.

Fig. 4b (above right): A “signature paper” with the collection from W.F. van Lawick van Pabst, most likely written by the younger Wilhelmina Frederika who would have had a Dutch education in the East Indies, unlike at least two of her brothers who were sent back to the Netherlands for their education. Bureau of the Royal Household. Photo courtesy of the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, Bangkok.

Fig. 5 (right): Workshop of W. F. van Lawick van Pabst, Yogyakarta, Java. Sarong (unsewn) with Delima Wantah (Pomegranate) Pattern. Yogyakarta. Hand-drawn wax resist, vat-dyed on plain-weave cotton. 107.4 x 217.5 cm. Bureau of the Royal Household, Inv. #171. Photo courtesy of the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, Bangkok.

Fig. 6a (right) and 6b (inset): Sarong (unsewn). Signed “Wed. Jans” (Mrs. A.J.E. Jans, b. Java, c. 1850-c.1920). Pekalongan. Hand-drawn wax resist, vat-dyed on plain-weave cotton, 105.8 x 220.7 cm. Bureau of the Royal Household, Inv. #109. Photo courtesy of the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, Bangkok

Fig. 7 (far right): Ikat Kepala (Man’s Headcloth) Tasikmalaya (Cipedes). Hand-drawn wax resist, vat-dyed on plain-weave cotton. 102.4 x 102.4 cm. Bureau of the Royal Household, Inv. #199. Photo courtesy of the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, Bangkok.



Notes

- 1 The author wishes to acknowledge QSMT colleagues: Piyavara Teekara Nateno, director; Sartarat Muddin, curator; Piyanan Petcharaburanin, editor; catalogue co-authors S. Muddin, Judi Achjadi and Dr. Sandra Niessen, and Project Advisor: Drs. Mariah Waworuntu. Some information in this article is drawn from the excellent catalogue contributions of Dr. Niessen and Judi Achjadi. Lack of space prevents acknowledging all those who contributed to this multi-year project.
- 2 The exhibition is accompanied by a 320-page, full colour catalogue, *A Royal Treasure: The Javanese Batik Collection of King Chulalongkorn of Siam*, Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, Bangkok: 2019.
- 3 Sartaprong, Kannikar. *A True Hero: King Chulalongkorn of Siam’s Visit to Singapore and Java in 1871*. IAS, no. 63. Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2008.
- 4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kassian\\_Cephas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kassian_Cephas). The largest archive of photographs by Céphas, including those of the 1896 visit to Java, are in the collection of KITLV and now housed in the Leiden University Libraries.
- 5 HM King Chulalongkorn, *Rayathang thiao chawa kwa song duan [Narrative of a Journey to Java of Over Two Months in Rattanakosin Era 115]*. Cremation Volume. Bangkok, B.E. 2468 [1925], p. 90. [In Thai, translated by S. Muddin]. This is the king’s diary from his 1896 trip. National Archives of Thailand, Bangkok.
- 6 Loc. cit., p. 255.
- 7 See Harmen Veldhuisen, *Batik Belanda 1840-1940: Dutch Influence in Batik from Java, History, and Stories*. Jakarta: Gaya Favorit Press, 1990, pp. 116-117; see also, *A Royal Treasure*, pp. 63-64.
- 8 Crafts of the Netherlands East Indies were the focus of the Dutch government’s pavilion. Batik process was particularly highlighted. A handful of the sample pattern squares from the vLVP workshop in the Tropenmuseum match full-size batik in the king’s collection. There is no doubt all were produced in the same workshop.
- 9 See Sandra Niessen, “Kain making at the Western Woman’s House”: The van Lawick van Pabst Story,” in Dale Gluckman and Sartarat Muddin (eds. and co-authors), *A Royal Treasure. The Javanese Batik Collection of King Chulalongkorn of Siam*, 2018, Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, Bangkok, Chapter 2, pp. 57-75.

# Kantha forms and transformations



Niaz Zaman and Cathy Stevulak

The *kantha* or, as it is increasingly referred to as the *nakshi kantha*, is an important aspect of Bengali women's domestic arts and crafts. *Kanthas* are made in most parts of Bangladesh as well as in West Bengal. The *kantha* has taken many forms: from simple quilts made at home for personal, domestic, or ritual use to elaborate story-telling wall hangings for public view. *Kanthas* are used for traditional garments, such as *saris* and shawls, as well as for Western garments, such as jackets and stoles. Made initially from old garments like cotton *saris*, *lungis*, and *dhotis*, the *kantha* is now made with new cloth, either cotton or silk.

With these transformations, the *kantha* can now be found worldwide, not only in museums, but in catalogues and shops, in drawing rooms and boardrooms, and worn by fashion models on runways.

## How *kanthas* are made

Traditionally, layers of old *saris*, *lungis*, or *dhotis* were put together and reconstituted into objects of functional, ritual, or ceremonial use. Borders and motifs were embroidered in variations of the running stitch with coloured thread, traditionally drawn from the borders of old *saris*. The empty spaces were stitched with white yarn to create a ripple effect [Fig. 1].

At least five to seven *saris* were needed to make a full-length *kantha* – the number of layers depending on the thickness required. Ceremonial *kanthas*, such as those spread

for guests and to accommodate the bride or groom would have fewer layers and finer embroidery. Thicker *kanthas*, to be used as winter quilts, would have more layers of cloth.

At the beginning of the process, women would spread layers of the cloth on the packed-earth ground of the courtyard. The edges would be pinned to the ground with thorns from date trees. The cloths would then be folded in and stitched. Long running stitches at intervals down the length of the cloth would be worked to keep the layers together. The *kantha* could then be folded and put away to be further

worked and embroidered when convenient. Typically, a large lotus would be worked in the centre. Following this, corner motifs and then numerous other motifs or scenes would be added, depending on the time and artistic ability of the *kantha* artist. Some very fine 19th-century *kanthas* relate scenes from the story of Radha and Krishna. Decorative *kanthas* are stitched through the layers of cotton or through a surface layer of silk and lower layers of cotton. Embroidery yarn in the past was taken from the borders of *saris* and would be generally blue, red, or black.

Today, old *saris* are replaced by new cotton fabrics. As this material is normally thicker, two layers of cloth may be sufficient for a *kantha*. Most of the stitching and embroidery yarns today are purchased separately and are available in multiple colours. While cotton yarn is still in general use, nowadays bamboo, rayon, or silk floss threads are also used, especially for commercial *kanthas*.

In most Bengali families, small *kanthas* made of soft, old cloth, are used to wrap babies. Husbands or sons who leave home to work almost always carry with them a *kantha* made by their wives or mothers. The *kantha* symbolises the affection of the maker for the recipient and, being made of rags, is also believed to grant protection from the evil eye. *Kanthas* also form part of the dowry of brides in certain parts of Bangladesh and West Bengal.

## Brief history

Quilts made of multiple layers of cloth are common all over the South Asian subcontinent. However, the *kantha*, with its running stitch embroidery, seems to have its roots in Bengal. Known sometimes as *sujni* – from the word for stitch or needle – it is also related in form to the *suzanis* of Central Asia.

The finest 19th-century *kanthas* come from the Jessore, Faridpur, and Khulna regions of Bangladesh, bordering what is now the State of West Bengal in India. Others come from Rajshahi and Kushtia, where they are generally thicker than the others. A *kantha* from Kushtia presented as a gift to the renowned poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), who lived in Shelaidaha between 1891 and 1901, is preserved in Santiniketan.

The early years of the twentieth century saw the rise of the *swadeshi* movement for independence from Britain. It also saw an interest in recovering the past traditions of Bengal. The Bengali educationist, writer, and folklorist Dinesh Chandra Sen (1866-1939) collected ballads and *kanthas* from the region – work in which he was aided by a young Jasimuddin (1903-1976), who would later write the poem *Nakshi Kanthar Maath*, translated as *The Field of the Embroidered Quilt*. The term *nakshi kantha* derives from this poem. The Bengali civil servant, folklorist and writer Gurusaday Dutta (1882-1941) collected different forms of folk art, including the *kantha*. It was also at this time that the art historian Stella Kramrisch (1896-1993) started collecting *kanthas* and writing about them.

The partition of India in 1947 led to many Hindu families leaving East Pakistan for India, taking with them *kantha* skills. At Santiniketan, in India, a special form of *kantha* was developed – along with batik and leather work – to provide work for women. Santiniketan

Fig. 1 (above): Stitches between motifs create a ripple effect, characteristic of the traditional *kantha*. Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection, 2009, 2009-250-2 detail. Collection Page: <https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/278944.html>

Fig. 2 (right): Photographs of 19th-century *kanthas* such as this inspired Surayia Rahman to design a wall-hanging for the Sonargaon Hotel, Dhaka. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Stella Kramrisch Collection, 1994, 1994-148-684. Collection Page: <https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/88594.html>

Fig. 3 (below): "Nakshi Kantha Tapestry" designed by Surayia Rahman, stitched by artisans of Kumudini. Situated in the Sonargaon Hotel, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Photo: Ruby Ghuznavi.





kanthas, however, are worked with the herringbone stitch, which helps create large areas of colour. This *kantha* work is mainly used to embellish silk saris and is very different from the type of *kantha* made in Bangladesh.

In East Pakistan, growing cultural awareness against cultural domination by West Pakistan arose together with the Language Movement, especially after the police shooting on a peaceful procession demanding Bangla as a state language on 21st February 1952. This also helped promote the survival of the *kantha* craft in Bangladesh. The real revival of the *kanthas* started with the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, when artists such as Quamrul Hassan (1921-1988) and Zainul Abedin (1914-1976) initiated a resurgence of interest in traditional arts and crafts, including the *kantha*.

### Kantha revival

In 1971, famine and food shortages ravaged the newly-born nation, and many women were widowed in the preceding war or separated from their families. In an attempt to rehabilitate destitute women, *kantha*-making was promoted as an economic activity, particularly in Jessore, Kushtia, Faridpur, and Rajshahi, parts of Bangladesh with strong *kantha* traditions. Karika, a handicrafts cooperative, was set up and helped promote *kanthas* by using its motifs and embroidery on household goods and garments. Karika was followed by Aarong – the outlet for the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and then for the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) – and Kumudini, another NGO. However, the catalyst for the *kantha* revival was, strangely enough, the opening of the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka, in 1981.

Surayia Rahman (1932-2018), an artist who had earlier worked with the Women's Voluntary Association, was invited by BRAC to design a *kantha* wall-hanging for the new hotel, based on photographs from the Stella Kramrisch Collection in the Philadelphia Museum of Art [Fig.2]. BRAC, which had been working with *kanthas* and had produced a sample wall hanging, was, for various reasons, unable to embroider the large textile artwork for the hotel. As a result, Surayia Rahman's design was embroidered by artisans at Kumudini. [Fig. 3].

Apart from Surayia Rahman, Razia Quadir also designed two pieces, one of them replicating different forms of the lotus motif down its length, the other a marriage scene using the basic running stitch. Razia Quadir's *kantha* with the marriage scene and Surayia Rahman's wall hanging in the Sonargaon Hotel have influenced later *kantha* production in Bangladesh.

Surayia Rahman co-founded the Skill Development for Underprivileged Women (SDUW) organisation in 1982, in cooperation with a Canadian expatriate, Maureen Berlin. Rahman created elaborate story-telling designs for *kantha* wall-hangings. Her refined designs were often on silk rather than on recycled saris or cotton, and she used locally produced bamboo-processed threads. Embroiderers working for the organisation used a hoop to hold the fabric taut as they stitched the designs [Fig. 4], thus creating a distinction from the ripple effect in earlier

Fig. 4 (above): *Kantha* embroidery in process, stitched with a hoop, Bangladesh. Photograph: Kantha Productions LLC and Anil Advani.

Fig. 5 (right): *The Field of the Embroidered Quilt: Nakshi Kanthar Maath*. "Nakshi Kantha Tapestry" by Surayia Rahman and artisans of Arshi, Bangladesh. Photo: Kantha Productions LLC and Anil Advani.

Fig. 6 (below): Farah Khan in a self-designed *dupatta*, with *kantha*-inspired embroidery. West Bengal, India. Photo: Hafiz Khan.



*kanthas*, where the fabric was held by hand or stretched with a foot.

Rahman's wall-hangings, created in cooperation with the women artisans who she trained, became known as "nakshi *kantha* tapestries." Though *kantha* traditionalists protested that Rahman's *kantha* wall-hangings were not true *kanthas*, Rahman persisted in creating this refined textile art in the *kantha* tradition. Following four years at SDUW, Rahman formed her own organisation, Arshi, to promote skill development, dignified work, and income generation for hundreds of women. A number of Rahman's pieces are based on Jasimuddin's poems, such as *The Field of the Embroidered Quilt: Nakshi Kanthar Maath* [Fig. 5].



### Movement of the revival to West Bengal

In Bangladesh, the *kantha* revival focused first on the traditional craft that could be used in contemporary ways; in West Bengal, India, the *kantha* was more commercialised from the outset. Santiniketan designs, for example, are to be found on inexpensive blouse pieces as well as on expensive silk saris. Bangladeshi saris using *kantha* embroidery are generally more muted. Often, it is only the body of the *sari* that is worked in the running stitch, creating the traditional ripples, with a simple weave-running stitch border and an *anchal* – or *sari* end – with a few traditional *kantha* motifs, such as the *kalka* or paisley.

Crafts Council of West Bengal has worked closely with *kantha* producers. Ruby Palchoudhuri, at present President Emeritus of Crafts Council of West Bengal, sent young designers to different museums to examine the different stitches used in *kanthas*. The Golden Jubilee celebration of the Crafts Council of West Bengal in 2018 focused on *kanthas* and *kantha*-makers. Titled "The Eye of the Needle: *Kantha*, the Quilt Embroidery of Bengal," it exhibited antique pieces as well as contemporary ones.

Tens of thousands of artisans in West and East Bengal now make *kanthas* for income generation. Relatively few develop their own designs for their own use, but replicate popular designs, often designed by specialists. In West Bengal, for example, Farah Khan has been making high-end *dupattas* and saris using the type of *kantha* stitches used for the rural wedding piece designed by Razia Quadir for Hotel Sonargaon and popularised by Banche Shekha, a Jessore-based NGO [Fig. 6].

Artists are also exploring the *kantha* for inspiration. The Bangladeshi artist, Shah Abdus Shakoor (1947-), paints *kantha* stitches on his pictures based on Mymensingh ballads. The late Indian artist, Meera Mukherjee (1923-1998), drew upon the *kantha* for her embroidered pieces, called "stitched paintings," whereby children made the drawings and *kantha* artisans did the embroidery.

### Global movement of *kanthas*

Foreigners visiting Bangladesh and India – where antique pieces find purchasers – acquire traditional *kanthas* and newly worked *kantha* wall hangings to take home, raising an awareness of the fineness of the handwork of this region. Exhibitions of *kanthas* have been hosted in prestigious museums, such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Japanese collector Hiroko Iwatate has established the Iwatate Folk Textile Museum in Tokyo, which has a large collection of *kanthas*. *Kantha* quilts and *kantha*-embellished garments can be found on the internet, in shops selling handcraft, and in department stores in Bengal and around the world. As the *kantha* becomes appreciated worldwide, with more attention paid to sustainability, slow fashion, and folk arts, it also has the potential to inspire new generations of artists, craftspeople, and designers.

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# The Batik Kompeni from Indonesia

Nuning Y Damayanti Adisasmito

**B**atik *Tulis* production has gone through a period of decline, due to the penetration and application of new printing techniques, which are commercially more attractive, being less time consuming and more efficient in quantities of production. Yet, *batik tulis* has proved to be a technique that can adapt to changing eras. It has even become an exclusive, and highly appreciated product, and has its own economic value that continues to increase. Batik also received world recognition as a Masterpiece of Intangible World Heritage by UNESCO on 2 October 2009.

One of the most unique batik styles is the "Batik Kompeni," which was developed during the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia, in the early nineteenth century. During those years, Dutch entrepreneurs played an important role in developing the batik industry, especially in Java. Batik production increased, and new patterns and motifs were created that reflected the blending of Eastern and Western (Indonesian and European) visual elements. This process led to a new style that is called *Batik Kompeni*. Batik was first produced in Cirebon in northern Java, one of the main traditional centres of the batik industry. It continued to be developed by traditional Cirebon batik artists, inspiring modern batik artists until the present day.

## Early development of Batik Kompeni

In 1799 the position of the VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*) in the Dutch East Indies was taken over by the Dutch state. This transfer of power led many Dutch people to migrate to Indonesia, and most of them settled in Java. At that time, the importation of Indian textiles to the Dutch East Indies had stopped due to various unfavourable conditions. Due to this development, the Dutch switched to local workshops for producing textile fabrics, and became an opportunity for batik craftsmen in Java to increase production and widen the market for batik products.

At that time, the batiks in Java were grouped into two main commodity styles, namely "Palace Batik"/"Batik Istana" (produced in the center of Java) and "Batik Pesisir" (produced along the northern coast of Java). *Batik Istana*, also known as *Batik Vorstenlanden*,

Batik represents an age-old technique for applying decorative motifs to traditional Indonesian fabrics. The motifs of *Batik Tulis* (hand-drawn batik) are worked with wax that is heated and applied upon the hand-drawn lines of a motif to form a liquid barrier between the colours being applied. This technique is still being worked today in Indonesia, and it is widely used and studied by artists, craftsmen, and others in various countries. The technique is not only used for making cloth motifs; artists and craftsmen also learned and practised this technique as a medium of artistic expression.

was made mainly for the aristocracy in Solo and Yogyakarta. *Batik Istana* is characterised by the standard patterns and symbols that were often used for traditional ritual occasions. Coastal batik or *Batik Pesisir* – was more widely used by ordinary people. It was far more diverse and more likely to change over time.

The *Batik Kompeni* style was developed from the *Batik Pesisir* that includes new motifs developed to meet the tastes of the Dutch. Several local batik craftsmen cooperated in making batik and started to join business groups, many of whom were led by Indo-Dutch (women) entrepreneurs. The *Batik Kompeni* style is unique because it often reflects popular European folk tales, such as "Snow White," "Little Red Riding Hood," [Fig. 1] and "Cinderella." (Fig.2). *Batik Kompeni* also depicts the lives of the *Kompeni* soldiers armed with rifles, as well as the lives of Dutch settlers. [Fig. 3].

## The Batik Kompeni style and the role of Dutch batik entrepreneurs (1800-1900s)

From the early nineteenth century, European art and culture were massively introduced in Java. Local Indonesian artists and craftsmen have studied Western drawing techniques, such as the use of perspective and realism. This development led to a hybrid style of Javanese and Western traditions, which can clearly be seen in the *Batik Kompeni* style that was worked by Cirebon artists and craftsmen [Fig. 4].

The production of the *Batik Kompeni* style soon spread across Central Java and East Java, but especially along the coastal areas of North Java. This was clearly the golden period of Dutch-style batik. Indo-Dutch entrepreneurs were collaborating with batik craftsmen to develop their businesses in various cities in the north of Java. Batik centres were developed and built in Semarang, Ungaran, Banyumas, Pacitan, Surakarta, and Yogyakarta. In 1910,

the Javanese *Batik Kompeni* also appeared in Banyumas, in southern Java.

Pekalongan was an important centre for the batik industry of Central and North Java. In this city, the batik craftsmen and entrepreneurs came up with the labels and names of specific *Batik Kompeni* motifs, that were often named after themselves, such as the *Vansolen/Zuilen* motif (from the name Van Zuylen) and the *Panastroman* motif (from the name Van Osteroom). In addition, the so-called *Frankemon* batik also became famous for the "green colour *Frankemon*" (from the name von Franquemont).

Dutch batik entrepreneurs have also produced batik with animal and plant motifs, such as storks that appeared in the midst of water plants. In addition, traditional patterns were also enriched with European or, specifically, Dutch nuances and decorative patterns.

Apart from the Dutch's, Chinese and Arab batik entrepreneurs have also appeared, and they played a huge role in the development of *Batik Kompeni* to meet the ever growing demands of the market. Initially the batik business was still an indigenous home industry, but the production process was later then transformed into industrial scale by the batik entrepreneurs. However, by 1942, when the Japanese occupied Java, most of the Dutch in Indonesia had either returned to the Netherlands or were interned by the Japanese, so that almost all of the Dutch batik companies in Java stopped their production.

## Challenges and opportunities for Batik Kompeni

Modern batik production in Indonesia adheres to various styles and traditions, with different motifs, materials, techniques, and functions. Creativity in the production of modern batik designs is very diverse and functional. The diversity of product creations and batik motifs today has made it hard to

recognise the roots of the cultural traditions. In the past, batik products were sacred, functional, and valued collectively. Whereas now, the making of batik has increasingly responded to market imperatives like consumer demand and profit margins.

In the current situation, various aspects of cultures are in a crisis caused by the meeting of local and foreign influences. However, many artists and craftsmen, especially those producing traditional batik, have become engaged in the preservation and promotion of their own culture. Creativity and persistence of batik designers and craftsmen will always be needed in facing many challenges.

The growing regional autonomy in Indonesia has lent support to the preservation of traditional local arts and crafts. Information is being collected, and local potential is being developed as an asset for the future. Batik production is also changing, answering market demands, and new batik designs are being developed with the help of artists and designers creativity. Batik that contains of ethnic values has also emerged, with a new face and forms that most people call modern and contemporary.

Globalisation is a challenge that must be faced with care in order to maintain local values and local identity. Indonesian batik designs are based on norms, values, traditions, and innovations that have developed over centuries in the archipelago. The *Batik Kompeni* style, which has the potential to further inspire the development of batik, tells a nuanced story that is simultaneously global and Indonesian.

The development of new motifs, especially in the contemporary *Batik Kompeni* style, has become a great success because of the excellent quality and high economic value of the product.

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Fig. 1 (above): *Batik Kompeni*, batik pattern depicting the story of "Little Red Riding Hood", Colonial Period 1980-1940. (Source: Museum of Danar Hadi, Surakarta).

Fig. 2 (right): *Batik Kompeni*, new batik pattern depicting scenes of "Geusan Ulun, Hero of Cirebon War", 1980-2020 (Source: Photo Documentation by Nuning Y. Damayanti A).

Fig. 3 (far right): *Batik Kompeni*, batik pattern depicting epic scenes of "Pandawa dan Kurawa, Mahabharata", 1900-1940. (Source: Photo Documentation by Nuning Y. Damayanti A).



# Sukajan: crossing cultures

Francesco Montuori

Another example of a garment that has crossed the borders delineating cultures, blurring such imaginary lines, and travelling across the globe is the *sukajan* from Japan [fig. 1]. This is a short jacket open down the front (with either zips or buttons), long sleeves, and a low, upright collar. These jackets are often lined in the same or a contrasting material. The main feature of the *sukajan* jacket is the embroidery that decorates the front, back, and sleeves of the garment. Yet, the shape of such jackets is not originally from Japan. Instead, it is an adaptation of American military and sportswear.

## American bomber and letterman jackets

There are two comparable American garments that have influenced the *sukajan* jacket. The first is the bomber jacket worn by US aircrews. These were originally made from leather lined with wool fleece, which was intended to keep the wearers warm when flying at high altitudes. There was also another version of the bomber jacket, lighter and cooler since it was produced without the fleece lining. In both cases the jacket and the sleeves were of the same material and colour.

The second American garment is the so-called letterman jacket, which has been popular with university athletes since the 1860s. These garments usually have a large letter on them, which indicated the school, college, or university with which the wearer was affiliated. The letterman jackets are characterised by having sleeves in either a different colour from the main body of the garment, or sometimes in a different material, but in the same colour as the main garment. Another form developed from the letterman jacket, namely the baseball jacket, which is very similar, but lacks the big letter.

Neither the bomber jacket nor the letterman jacket, apart from the large letter, normally has any decoration on it. In contrast, the Japanese *sukajan* jacket has social, political, military, as well as fashion statements literally stitched onto them. The embroidery may take the form of hand- or machine-worked patterns, or indeed a combination of the two.

## Development of the *sukajan* jacket

The origins of the *sukajan* jacket can be pinpointed to the years immediately following the end of World War II (1939-1945) in Japan, and more specifically to the military base of Yokosuka (a city in the Kanagawa Prefecture, in the proximity of Tokyo), then under the control of the American Navy. In fact, the term *sukajan* is derived from *Suka* (from *Yokosuka*) and *jan*, short for the Japanese term *janpaa* (mutated from the English word *jumper*), to indicate the place where this type of garment originated.

The personnel on the Yokosuka base would have worn both the military bomber jacket when on duty and the letterman-style jackets when off-duty. *Sukajan* jackets developed as a result of US navy personnel starting to have their (off-duty) jackets customised and decorated by local Japanese tailors, using machine embroidery and elements initially associated with Japan. As a result, *sukajan* jackets started to represent a type of garment shared by the American military community stationed in the country, and at the same time they became a symbol of the Japanese who embroidered and wore them.

Since people first started wearing a feather or a bead, dress and identity have played an important role. Sometimes ideas and designs were swapped and exchanged (the global *buteh*/paisley motif is a good example of this), while on other occasions it is the garment itself that has travelled from one culture to another. The pyjamas of India became sleepwear in the West, and the kimono from Japan became an indoor garment for elite men in The Netherlands from the 18th century. Even that global fashion statement – namely the pair of jeans (USA in origin), made from denim (originally from France) – was originally workmen's clothing and is now worn by men, women, and children across the world in every social group. Or how about the suit worn by many men (with or without a tie) and some women to stress their social status, place, and knowledge of the business or professional world? All of these, and many more garments, have travelled, been adopted and adapted to the needs of other people and cultures.

More and more American servicemen started wearing *sukajan* jackets when off-duty, but with decoration on it that reflected their military affiliations [fig. 2]. In this way, they provided inspiration for a new Japanese fashion line that has continued to the present day.

Furthermore, the wearing of *sukajan* jackets quickly expanded to other countries where US soldiers were stationed. In this way, the community wearing this type of jacket became bigger, including soldiers stationed in other military bases in East Asia, such as those in Korea or Vietnam [fig. 3].

From the 1950s onwards, this type of garment crossed the borders of the US military bases and started being used by various Japanese groups. It is notable, however, that at this time it was mostly worn by and associated with *yakuza* (criminal gangs) members. This development was at the beginning of a shift in the association of *sukajan* jackets, from American soldiers to Japanese 'bad boys.'

The embroidered subjects on 'Japanese' *sukajan* jackets may vary considerably, but there are some general trends that can be identified. Some, for example, represent elements usually associated with Japan, such as animals indicating power and leadership (e.g., dragons, tigers)[fig. 4]. Such elements would then strengthen the association between the group wearing it and the qualities usually attributed to such animals, mostly strength, thus highlighting the 'bad boys' narrative. These animals are also very common in Japanese traditional tattoos, *irezumi*, another practice very common amongst *yakuza* members.

Other nature-inspired forms included birds, butterflies, and floral motifs, such as cherry trees and wisteria, as well as Japanese icons

such as Mount Fuji. Overall, these motifs and embroidered subjects already appeared in traditional garments, including the kimono, possibly the source that gave the original inspiration for the selection of such elements. Yet, kimono decorations are often seasonal, meaning that the elements embroidered should match with the season when they were worn, whereas the same could probably not be said for *sukajan*. Matching with the season was not the point of wearing these jackets; more so, such garments aimed to look as 'Japanese' as possible. They would appear as 'inherently' Japanese to the American military. Natural symbols do, however, appear also elsewhere in East Asian embroidery or art in general, such as in Korea or in Vietnam, making these not exclusively Japanese. Thus, although *sukajan* jackets were initially born in Japan, they merge elements which were common in all of East Asia, making them 'Asian-style jackets' rather than simply Japanese jackets.

Other examples of *sukajan* jackets would appear to highlight the 'souvenir' nature of this type of jacket, with embroideries that do not highlight any sense of belonging to a particular group. Instead, they were keepsakes of a place with memories highlighted through the embroidered elements [fig. 5].

From the 1990s onwards, certain Western brands (such as Diesel and H&M) started to actively promote *sukajan* jackets in their own collections. One result of this is that more and more Japanese girls and women have started to wear *sukajan* jackets. Another result is that a cheaper line of *sukajan* has appeared, namely those with printed designs. This form is often associated with Chinese-produced garments.



Fig. 1: A black *sukajan* jacket by tailor TOYO, in the bomber jacket style (early 1950s-style; early 21st century, see Fig. 4; courtesy of the Textile Research Centre, Leiden, TRC 2021.0625).

Fig. 2: A *sukajan* (bomber) jacket by Schott, belonging to the 13th Airborne troops, stationed in Yokosuka (21st century, courtesy of the Textile Research Centre, Leiden, TRC 2021.0629).

Fig. 3: A *sukajan* (bomber) jacket from the 1960s with a relevant map of Vietnam embroidered on the back - Phu Hoa Binh Duong is the name of a district north of Ho Chi Minh City (courtesy of the Textile Research Centre, Leiden, TRC 2021.0628).

Today, *sukajan* jackets are spread all over the world and are becoming more and more popular. Furthermore, although the origins of these garments had a strong connection with the community where they were created – namely the US military in Japan, or later among *yakuza* members – nowadays they have lost any specific military or *yakuza* connotations. Instead, their meaning and identity have been renegotiated. They have become garments whose 'Asian-like' features are still recognised, but they cannot be classed as distinctly or even typically American or Asian. Instead, they have become global objects.

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Fig. 4: A *sukajan* (baseball) jacket with a dragon and tiger fighting each other (1980s; courtesy of the Textile Research Centre, Leiden, TRC 2021.0624).



Fig. 5: A reversible *sukajan* (baseball) jacket with Hawaiian elements embroidered on the back (1950s; courtesy of the Textile Research Centre, Leiden, TRC 2021.0626).

# Textiles with a Dual Heritage

Caroline Stone

Working for a number of years with the Civilizations in Contact Project at Cambridge University, I became fascinated by textiles that are the product of these contacts and which have, if you like, two parents or elements from different parts of the world.



1.



2.



3.

Fig. 1: Child's cap from Afghanistan, 3rd quarter of the 20th century. Collection and photograph by author.

Fig. 2: Japanese indigo and white cotton ikat, ca. 1930-40. Collection and photograph by author.

Fig. 3: Woman's Ottoman style bolero from Tunis, late 19th century. Gilt spangles and metal thread embroidery on black velvet. The motif of birds - especially peacocks, their flesh was believed to be incorruptible and hence the symbol of immortality - drinking at a fountain, representing the water of life, is common on palaeo-Christian sarcophagi in the area and made its way into folk art and embroidery. Collection and photograph by author.



4.



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Fig. 4: Guatemalan apron bought new in La Antigua ca. 2005. A base of Totoncapán jaspe with machine embroidery and passementerie. The shape is 1950s American, the decoration hybrid, but these aprons had become fashionable and part of local dress, especially for the market women. Collection and photograph by author.

Fig. 5: Rabat marriage curtain ca. 1900. Hand-embroidered silk on Indian muslin. Collection and photograph by author.

This could be design, in the case of a very moving child's cap from Afghanistan, embroidered with military helicopters, probably Russian [fig. 1]. Did the boy ask for that pattern? More likely, it was embroidered by a mother hoping to protect her child, as more traditional textiles feature snakes and scorpions. Planes are occasionally found on North African *kelims*, dating from World War II. They are also found on an indigo and white cotton ikat, probably for a *yukata* from 1930s Japan [fig. 2].

Another example, this time stretching across millennia as well as miles, is the motif of two peacocks drinking at a fountain, symbolising the water of life. It was probably borrowed from a Palaeo-Christian sarcophagus, of which there are many in the region, before entering folk iconography in North Africa and the Near East - here on a *bolero* from Tunis [fig. 3].

Again, there is the garment itself. In Guatemala, for example, there is no tradition

of decorative aprons, so common in the Slavic world. The elaborate ones worn today with traditional dress in Guatemala are borrowed from Europe, or perhaps North America. The decoration can be in the local style or, as here, hybrid [fig. 4].

It could also be technique. The standard skirt material for Guatemalan Indian women, particularly from El Quiché, is a kind of ikat known as *jaspe*. The technique seems not to have been in use in Central America before the Conquest, nor does it come from Spain or elsewhere in Europe. It is, however, well known in the Philippines. Many things were brought from there to the Americas by the Spaniards. Could ikat have travelled as well?

Given the enormous trade in textiles at all periods of history, it is not surprising to find all kinds of combinations. To give a one example: a marriage curtain, acquired in Rabat and embroidered in the traditional local manner, but using as its base material Indian white-

on-white embroidered muslin [fig. 5]. A similar example used a *chikankari sari*, probably from Lucknow. As an additional twist, according to one theory, this type of work is thought to have originated in Shiraz, imported into India by the Mughals.

Or, again, a 17th century kimono with panels of Indian chintz, introduced to Japan by the Portuguese and usually too costly to be used for anything but small bags and purses. The Japanese soon learned to imitate these cotton fabrics - *sarasa* - although the designs could never be mistaken for the Indian originals. A comparable example might be the Russian cottons exported in vast quantities to Central Asia and used as linings for robes, furnishings, etc. Eventually, they were produced there, mainly in Uzbekistan, although imports continued, later from farther afield (i.e., Japan and China).

I became especially interested in this question of dual heritage when working on the development and travels of the embroidered silk Chinese shawls, commonly known in English as Canton shawls, because of the region where they were made (now

Guangzhou). They are known in Spanish as *mantones de Manila*, because Manila is where they were trans-shipped. Shawls were a standard item across Europe for centuries, worn for warmth or for decoration, but in the early 19th century Chinese shawls began to appear in great numbers - especially, but not exclusively, in the Hispanic world, where they became an element in the national dress of various regions. In China, however, the square fringed shawl has never been a standard article of clothing, although stoles were worn at an earlier period, as seen in paintings from the Tang dynasty (618-906). The Canton shawl is therefore itself an East-West hybrid.

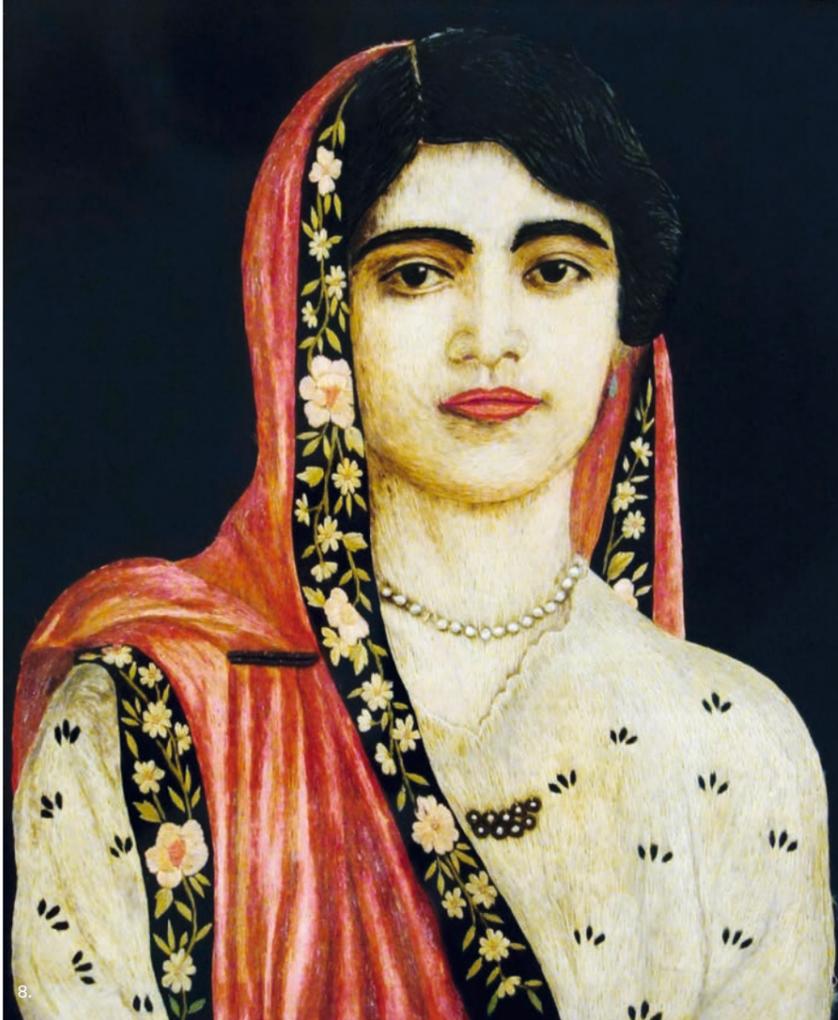
Since part of the appeal of these shawls was their exoticism, although they were commissioned by Western merchants (the Spanish author Perez Galdos has a wonderful and accurate description of the trade in his novel *Fortunata y Jacinta*),<sup>1</sup> the designs were almost always Chinese. Some of the earliest examples, however, have clearly Western motifs, especially a nosegay tied up with a ribbon. This was a very fashionable pattern around 1800, which made its way not only to



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Fig. 6: A shawl from Manila? Early 20th century, hand embroidered silk on silk. The use of European stitches and stylisation suggest it may have been made in The Philippines rather than China. Collection and photo: Caroline Stone.

Fig. 7: Mughal influence? Mid 19th century, hand embroidered silk on silk. This superb quality shawl is one of a very small group in which the flowers are stylized in the Mughal rather than the Chinese manner. Private collection.

Fig. 8: Sari with embroidered ribbon border in a 19th century portrait of a young woman (Parsi?). Private collection, Mumbai.

Fig. 9: Shawl imitating the Manila shawls worn by the Spanish. Tétuan, Morocco, early-mid 20th century. Artificial silk, machine embroidered in the pastel colours favoured by the Ottomans ca. 1900. The flowers are a mixture of Asian and Turkish styles. Collection and photograph by author.

alternative: embroidered ribbons – *kors* – could be added to the sari border and *palu* [fig. 8]. Generally Chinese in style, but sometimes with popular Indian motifs, such as peacocks, they were exported in large quantity and often sold by Chinese pedlars.

There is another twist to the story, however. The Indians, as has frequently been noted, are excellent craftsmen and skilled copyists, so it is not surprising that before long imitations of these ribbons were being produced in India, particularly at Surat. It is actually very hard to tell originals and imitations apart. The way that stitches are worked and the thread is started and finished off varied from country to country. In this way the wrong side of the material can provide a clue as to the origin, even if the right side is a perfect imitation.

Ribbons have always been popular merchandise, and Chinese pedlars roamed far afield: the Caribbean, the High Desert in Oregon, and the Guatemalan highlands. In the last, they are found around the necks of the heavy woven blouses – *huipiles* – that form part of traditional dress. Because the original ribbons were expensive or hard to obtain, they were copied, even though weaving rather than embroidery was the local speciality. In Comalapa or San Antonio Aguas Calientes, for example, they are sometimes found on the necks of *huipiles* woven with patterns that derive from the elaborate Italian and Spanish brocades exported to the New World and used for church vestments. Some of these silks, in turn, were influenced by imports from Persia long before, once again adding another layer to the story.

The Canton shawl, which began as a luxury accessory, became part of the Hispanic version of the national dress in Central and South America, where visitors were often amazed at the purchasing power of working-class and even rural women. In Mexico, the embroideries influenced the spectacular *China poblana* costume, while in Guatemala, brightly coloured flowers, particularly popular in *Chichicastenango* weavings, undoubtedly owe something to the shawls.

Following the shawls to a different area of the world: in the European tradition they were worn around the shoulders or over the head, often for warmth, or sometimes decoratively around the waist. However, when Canton shawls reached Palestine, brought back as gifts for the women of the family – usually darker colours and without figures – they were draped as part of the headdress, essentially as a veil.

In coastal Morocco, where Spanish presence was much in evidence, numerous imitations were made. Here we have a new mixture, this time with Ottoman aesthetics, shown both by the tulip design and the pastel “sugar almond” colours. A good example is a 1920s shawl from Tétuan, which was to be worn again as a *hijab* [fig. 9].

These are just a few of the innumerable examples of cultural contact demonstrated by textiles that have two sources of origin or, if you prefer, two ‘parents’ of different nationalities.

A word of warning about designs on the move. While many were transmitted in the ways we have described, companies producing embroidery thread, such as DMC in France, complicated the situation from the early 20th century onwards by giving away patterns or books of patterns to their clients. This resulted in the same designs appearing on cushions in England, the ritual towels known as *rushniki* in Russia and the Ukraine, Palestinian dresses, and woven *huipil* in Guatemala. The patterns of transmission had permanently changed. Later in the century, the picture was further complicated by well-meaning NGOs encouraging embroiderers to abandon their traditional patterns and colour schemes in order to produce items felt to be more saleable.

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## Notes

- 1 Galdós, Benito Pérez, *Fortunata y Jacinta*. Madrid, La Guindalera, 1887.

China, but also to the Ottoman Empire, where it begins to appear in domestic embroideries, probably copied from imported French silks.

The vast majority of the motifs, however, were the kind the embroideresses would have been used to working on their own clothes, or pieces they were commissioned to make for local use. Each element would have had a meaning, usually prophylactic or wishing ‘good luck’ – as is the case with almost all traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not recognised or was reinterpreted: the peony became a rose; trails of wisteria were read as grapes and were especially popular in the sherry producing area of Jerez.

As has already been mentioned, these Canton shawls were known as *mantones de Manila* in Spanish, but there are a few very rare shawls that may in fact have been produced in the Philippines [Fig. 6]. They are worked in a range of stitches more commonly found in items (e.g., tablecloths, blouses, etc.) made for export in the 20th century. Such stitches included drawn thread, cutwork, etc. – not part of the classic Chinese repertoire. This style

of embroidery, with its distinctively European stitches, is said to have been introduced into the Philippines by European nuns in the 17th century, who then taught them to the girls in their care. Interestingly, there are considerable similarities to the embroidery style of Madeira – it was introduced from the mainland about the same date, quite possibly by the same Orders of nuns – where today it is still very much a living craft.

Leaving aside the shawls for one moment, it is worth mentioning that much earlier examples of hybridising reached the West as well as can be seen in the silks produced in Lucca between c. 1200-1450. Church vestments and adornments commissioned by the missionary orders in the East, especially the Jesuits, have been preserved in a number of sacristies. A spectacular example is the vast hanging (9.78 x 5.76 m) completely worked with a design of birds and flowers, displayed at certain times of the year in the Cathedral of Seville. This panel arrived from the Philippines and dates to the late 17th century, but is almost certainly of Chinese workmanship. Whether it was commissioned for the Cathedral,

or whether it was simply acquired as a luxury object to be offered to the Church is unclear, but unlike certain vestments which have a mixture of Chinese and Christian motifs – or one in Oxford made from a dragon robe, but with Christian additions – this hanging has no obvious Christian iconography.

It was not only Europe that was charmed by Chinese embroideries. The Parsi community of the West Coast of India, especially in Mumbai, were important traders with wide ranging contacts and they commissioned embroidered saris – *gara* – from China. These were rare luxury items and very few have survived, but it is possible that this contact also influenced the shawls. There are a small number of very high-quality pieces embroidered with flowers, which are clearly copied from Mughal designs with a stylization that is definitely not Chinese [Fig. 7]. Were these from workshops that produced *gara*? Or were they copied from the Indian chintzes that were popular in Macao and even found their way to Japan? We do not know.

Saris embroidered in China were out of most people’s price range, but there was an

# IIAS Fellowship Programme

## In the spotlight

The International Institute for Asian Studies annually hosts a large number of visiting researchers (research fellows) who come to Leiden to work on their own individual research project. In addition, IIAS also facilitates the teaching and research by various professorial fellows as part of agreements with Dutch universities, foreign ministries and funding organisations. Meet our fellows at [www.iias.asia/fellows](http://www.iias.asia/fellows)



### Joel Bordeaux

“Without going out the door, know the world”

IIAS Research Clusters:  
Asian Heritages; Global Asia  
1 Nov 2020 – 31 Oct 2021

The country was already under partial lockdown when I arrived in November, so I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. The university was basically closed, too, but if one must studiously avoid the office and public transport, Leiden is a lovely place to do so. Here I have at least been given the opportunity to migrate a not-insignificant portion of the library's impressive South Asia collections to my apartment!

In fact, considering my own largely speculative sense of what life at the IIAS is

normally like, it seems fitting to settle into a project about imaginary journeys and lost locations here. My research, you see, concerns representations of 'China' and 'Chinese' ritual in Hindu sources, but I have come to suspect that the majority of the premodern Indian authors I have been reading were likely also 'working from home.' It is doubtful whether many of them ever left the subcontinent, or for that matter, whether they share a consistent understanding of the

geography of the places they refer to in Sanskrit as *Cīna* (China) or *Mahācīna* ('Greater China') other than locating them beyond the Himalayas.

What they do generally agree on is that the esoteric, so-called Chinese form of ritual taught by the Buddha in this foreign land ignores many of the regulations around purity and auspicious timing that typically structure Hindu rites – and indeed, there is evidence in the earliest sources of 'pious plagiarism' from early 2nd-millennium Indian Buddhist tantras that do just that. Presently, I am looking at how some early modern commentators (known to have travelled to Nepal at least, where they may well have encountered living Buddhist traditions long since extinct in India) attempted to assimilate or indigenize these supposedly imported practices. My hope is that this will yield clues as to what was considered essentially 'Chinese' about them.

During the last several months, I have enjoyed many productive conversations

with Leiden University faculty, library staff, and graduate students; mostly via webcam but occasionally out of doors, too, as the weather has grown more accommodating. I've been particularly fortunate to read Sanskrit – including an otherwise impenetrable manuscript by a terribly absentminded scribe – with Peter Bisschop and to discuss my project with Péter-Dániel Szántó, who often engages related matters in his own scholarship. Happily, I have also received a steady stream of useful feedback from across the globe in response to my online lecture ('The goddess Tara, Buddhism, and 'Chinese' ritual in Hindu tantra'),<sup>1</sup> and invitations to present additional work both in Leiden and at the University of Amsterdam. All told, I am very much looking forward to continuing my research here.

#### Notes

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77oz4tb8r0Y>



### Samia Kotele

From the quest for religious authority to the development of a new gender theology: the history of female ulema in Indonesia since the 20th century

IIAS Research Cluster: Global Asia  
15 Aug 2020 – 15 Aug 2021

My research stay at IIAS has been an outstanding chance to continue my research despite Covid-19 restrictions. Having the opportunity to work in the Special Collections of Leiden University led me to look into the intellectual history of female *ulema*

throughout the 20th century. The access to relevant and indispensable sources like correspondence, press, and manuscripts encouraged me to rethink my approach and methodology while my ethnographic research field in Indonesia was put on hold. Beyond

studying the nexus between Islam, gender, and knowledge production in a comparative perspective, this body of sources invited me to place female thought at the core of my study.

Through a study of concepts and ideas, my research aims not only to depict connections between reform and the condition of women, but also aims to understand the constant interactions between everyday life and the reflected life of female *ulema* in Indonesia. The richness of the sources pushed me to not only focus on moments of historical ruptures, but also to pay attention to the micro-evolutions occurring in various domains such as religion, education, politics and philanthropy, in which female *ulema* played a public and/or private role. The IIAS fellowship has given me the chance to discuss and widen my perspectives by giving me the tools to decipher the contexts

of production and reception of the discourses of pioneer women since the beginning of the 20th century. The extraordinary access of a wide range of sources from a diverse set of geographical locations allowed me to question the exceptionality of the engagement of women, both in the religious field and its contribution to the evolution of ideas through the process of human circulation. Leiden's vibrant community of researchers keeps inspiring me to enrich my visions and situate the historiographical stakes of this issue at the crossroads of Islamic and Asian studies. This serene and fascinating environment, together with its historical significance, has been an exceptional chance for me to develop my thought. I hope I can continue in the future to contribute to the intellectual and cultural scene.

## IIAS Fellowship possibilities and requirements



### Apply for an IIAS fellowship

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Netherlands, invites outstanding researchers to apply for an IIAS fellowship to work on a relevant piece of research in the social sciences and humanities. The next application deadline is 1 October 2021.



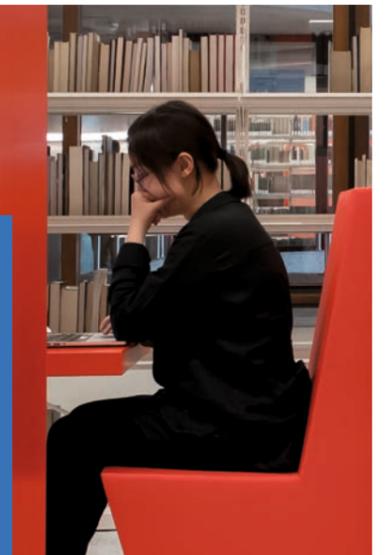
### Combine your IIAS fellowship with two extra months of research in Paris

When applying for an IIAS Fellowship, you have the option of simultaneously submitting an application for an additional two months of research at the Collège d'études mondiales of the Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme (CEM-FMSH), in Paris, France, immediately after your stay in Leiden. The next application deadline is 1 October 2021.



### Apply for a Gonda fellowship

For promising young Indologists at the post-doctorate level it is possible to apply for funding with the J. Gonda Foundation of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) to spend three to six months doing research at IIAS. The next application deadline is 1 April 2022.



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





## Eric Roose

Temples made in Heaven.  
Mandir design in the Netherlands

IIAS Research Cluster: Asian Heritages  
1 July 2021 – 30 June 2022



Fig. 1 (left): Zuiderkerk, Middelburg (NL), built 1974.  
Fig. 2 (above): Great Mosque of Touba, Senegal,  
built 1963. Fig. 3 (right): Taibah Mosque, Amsterdam  
(NL), built 2006.



I was born and raised in Zeeland, the southwestern tip of what is known in the Netherlands as the 'Bible Belt', a zone of orthodox reformed church communities. Here, the smallest towns and suburbs could have multiple churches that each could hold a fair part of the population. This never diminished the apparent need for further searches for Christian authenticity, resulting in continuing religious splits and building plans. To me – at least back then – those in the process of being constructed seemed to have nothing to do with the older churches that typically formed the historical village centres. I remember living around the corner of a new suburban church that struck me, as a boy, as some sort of circus tent (Fig. 1).

I studied African law and cultural anthropology in Leiden, and I spent time in Senegal to do research on tradition and innovation among agricultural communities. I noticed that different Sufi brotherhoods built all kinds of mosques, harbouring colourful domes and spires that appeared utterly fanciful and out of place among the adobe traditions of Islamic West Africa (Fig. 2). As with modern churches in the Netherlands, I could not relate these contemporary buildings to anything that I thought I knew about typical church or mosque architecture. It somehow felt as if all stylistic rules had been broken, and, concomitantly, all historical and regional ties.

This changed when I decided to pursue my studies in the field of art history. At Leiden University, a curriculum in non-Western art piqued my interest. Professor Aart Mekking, who had earlier introduced the methodology of iconography, or the 'content' of architecture, into the study of churches in the Low Countries, was Head of the section of architectural history. He was now in the process of turning it into a more comparative field along the lines of a theory of reality representation, within a

research program called Comparative World Architecture Studies, or COMWAS. In its wake, a number of master's and PhD theses would be produced by students with backgrounds in art history, design and anthropology, covering multiple regions, periods and religions, testing and developing their shared perspective in a coordinated effort.

As it appeared, the existence of historical and regional styles had largely been conceived in a colonial context, positioning Western aesthetics at the top of an evolutionary ladder. In the 19th century, these imagined styles were referred to in a search for design improvement, leading to a multiplicity of 'neo-styles'. In the 20th century, a countercurrent of modernism led to seeing the use of such references as 'backward' and as something that eventually could, and should, be abandoned. However, through a more iconographic lens, religious architecture throughout the world was in a continuous process of transformation, related to a process of religious politics that continuously transformed religion itself. Cult buildings could be seen as constellations of creatively recombined aspects from strategically selected heavenly and earthly prototypes, architecturally representing the ever-changing political realities of religious patrons vying for legitimacy among their desired constituencies. In addition, as I would later find out, the method of iconography had been introduced into the study of Islamic, Jewish and Hindu architectural history as well. This had been done separately and by equally authoritative scholars in their own fields, who apparently had also become dissatisfied with the explanatory value of a stylistic perspective.

My own PhD, conducted within the multidisciplinary setting of the Leiden-based International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern world, or ISIM, was about the new mosques in the West, with in-depth case studies

conducted in the Netherlands. I uncovered that, architecturally, patrons represented diverging visions of Islamic authenticity, creatively mixing notions of true theology with recombined references to physical and metaphysical buildings imbued with the correct sacral values. Among other things, I found references to the Koutoubia Minaret, the House of the Prophet, the Mosque of the Prophet, the Tomb of the Prophet, the Kaaba Mosque, the Wapaue Mosque, the Edirne Mosque, modern mosques in Izmir, the Mosque and Minaret of the Messiah in Qadian, the Taj Mahal and several other Sufi shrine complexes (Fig. 3), each specifically chosen and transposed for its appropriate religious connotations. And I now learned that the supposedly fantastical mosques in Senegal could actually be seen as competing representations of paradise that creatively recombined localised Sufi notions with a variety of venerated shrine complexes in the Middle East.

After my PhD, I was offered a postdoctoral fellowship at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, or AISSR, allowing me to minutely reconstruct half a century of building efforts among Inayatan Sufi patrons in the Netherlands and France. With this project, I was able to show how religious and architectural transformations are the result of ongoing competition for spiritual leadership and legitimacy in order to attract potential followers. With each added claimant came a new search for the authenticity of the original Message, to be appropriately represented in a newly devised building and in a rejection of rivaling theologies and designs. This led to some quite diverging iconographic desires, from an Islamic dargah to a fourfold meditating Buddha, with the end result in Katwijk as a wondrously shaped compromise (Fig. 4). After this project, I decided to look for a comparative and multidisciplinary setting and reconnected

with Leiden University – first, as an affiliate to Area Studies, and then to COMWAS again, which had continued as an informal research group around its retired initiator.

My focus then shifted to modern Christian and Jewish architecture, starting with postwar specimens. These were considered standards of modern religious architecture to which all non-Western religious architecture had to measure up. I soon found out that references to prototypes had been just as important for patrons as they had been in the past. The only difference was that modernist architects had started to compete with each other by using abstraction and essentialisation. For more and more religious patrons, in their continuous search for legitimacy and authenticity, this appeared perfectly usable as long as selected aspects from their physical and metaphysical prototypes would remain recognisable. I thus found, among other things, architectural references to divine mountains; tabernacle tents; Solomonian and Herodian temples; fire altars; forecourts; sheep barns; Noah's arks; Heavenly Jerusalems; Roman theaters around Christ; and ever more creative recombinations of these. My boyish association with the circus tent in Zeeland turned out to be a lot less off the mark than I thought.

Interestingly enough, a variegated series of Dutch church patrons have recently started to resort to recognisably 'classic' prototypes again, thereby including the historic village churches that had been abandoned as models for the modernist constructions built during my youth in Zeeland (Fig. 5). This phenomenon follows a new phase of searching for Christian authenticity in religion and architecture. It consciously makes use of a growing countercurrent of architects who have no problem with a more postmodern outlook – to the great despair of critics, who see their imagined evolutionary ladder go up in smoke.

Stimulated by the growing number of creatively shaped *mandirs* in the Netherlands (Fig. 6), as well as by a recent international tendency to 'explain' modern Hindu temples as 'halted in their evolution' compared to other cult buildings, I decided to connect to the Critical Heritages cluster of the IIAS. Based in Leiden, IIAS is the ideal multidisciplinary setting for me. In the coming year, I will be conducting a study of Dutch *mandirs* embedded in my ongoing research on church, synagogue and recent mosque design. I will be giving guest lectures on the subject, and I look forward to attending lectures touching on cults and temple buildings from all other possible periods and regions, making good use of Leiden University's many faculties that do so, in order to come to a truly comparative iconography of religious architecture.

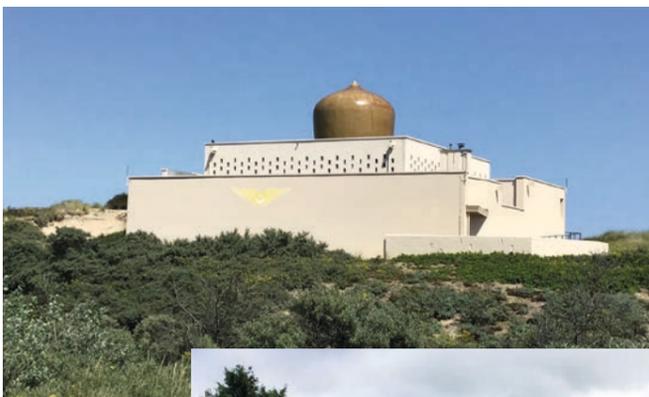
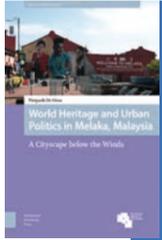


Fig. 4 (above left): Murad Hassil, Katwijk (NL), built 1970.  
Fig. 5 (above): Sealthiëlkerk, Leerdam (NL), built 2019.  
Fig. 6 (below left): Shri Vishnu Mandir, Almere (NL), built 2018. Photos 1, 3–6 by Eric Roose. Photo 2 in the public domain, courtesy Tinofrey on Wikimedia.

## New books

IIAS runs a book publication programme in cooperation with Amsterdam University Press (AUP). IIAS currently publishes monographs and edited volumes in three series, namely Global Asia, Asian Cities, and Asian Heritages. Each series has its own editor and editorial board. If you are interested in publishing a book in one of our series, please do not hesitate to contact the editors. <https://www.iias.asia/books>



### World Heritage and Urban Politics in Melaka, Malaysia: A Cityscape below the Winds

Pierpaolo De Giosa

ISBN: 978 94 6372 502 6  
Publication date: 1 July 2021 | Series: Asian Heritages

This book explores the politics of heritage in the Malaysian historical city par excellence. Already celebrated as the most glorious Malay kingdom and busy entrepôt, Melaka has been on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2008, on the strength of its multi-ethnic and multi-religious urban fabric. Yet, contrary to the expectations of heritage experts and aficionados, the global mission of safeguarding cultural heritage has become a tumultuous issue on the ground.

*World Heritage and Urban Politics in Melaka, Malaysia: A Cityscape below the Winds* analyses how the World Heritage 'label' is being used by different actors – such as international organizations, nation states, and society at large – to generate new economic revenues as well as to attract

tourists and investment for large-scale real estate development projects. In doing so, it reveals the complex and often contradictory stories behind heritage designations in urban milieus.

**Pierpaolo De Giosa** is a social anthropologist and former member of the research group 'The Global Political Economy of Cultural Heritage' at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. His research interests lie at the intersection of urban studies and critical heritage studies.

<https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463725026/world-heritage-and-urban-politics-in-melaka-malaysia>



### Constructing Kanchi: City of Infinite Temples

Emma Natalya Stein

ISBN: 6978 94 6372 912 3  
Publication date: 15 Oct 2021 | Series: Asian Cities

This book traces the emergence of the South Indian city of Kanchi as a major royal capital and multireligious pilgrimage destination during the era of the Pallava and Chola dynasties (circa seventh through thirteenth centuries). It presents the first-ever comprehensive picture of historical Kanchi, locating the city and its more than 100 spectacular Hindu temples at the heart of commercial and artistic exchange that spanned India, Southeast Asia, and China.

The author demonstrates that Kanchi was structured with a hidden urban plan, which determined the placement and orientation of temples around a central thoroughfare that was also a burgeoning pilgrimage route. Moving outwards from the city, she shows how the transportation networks, river systems, residential enclaves, and agrarian estates all

contributed to the vibrancy of Kanchi's temple life. The construction and ongoing renovation of temples in and around the city, she concludes, has enabled Kanchi to thrive continuously from at least the eighth century, through the colonial period, and up until the present.

**Emma Natalya Stein** (PhD, Yale) is Assistant Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art at the Freer and Sackler Galleries, the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art. Her research investigates the relationships among sacred architecture, urban space, and tropical landscapes. Dr. Stein has conducted fieldwork throughout South and Southeast Asia.

<https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463729123/constructing-kanchi>



### Heritage and the Making of Political Legitimacy in Laos: The Past and Present of the Lao Nation

Phill Wilcox

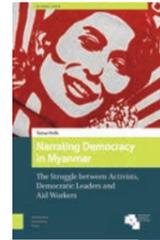
ISBN: 978 94 6372 702 0  
Publication date: 1 Oct 2021 | Series: Asian Heritages

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is nearly fifty years old, and one of the few surviving one-party socialist states. Nearly five decades on from its revolutionary birth, the Lao population continues to build futures in and around a political landscape that maintains socialist rhetoric on one hand and capitalist economics on the other. Contemporary Lao politics is marked by the use of cultural heritage as a source of political legitimacy. Researched through long term detailed ethnography in the former royal capital of Luang Prabang, itself a UNESCO recognised World Heritage Site since 1995, this book takes a fresh look at issues of legitimacy, heritage and national identity for different

members of the Lao population. It argues that the political system has become sufficiently embedded to avoid imminent risk of collapse but suggests that it is facing new challenges primarily in the form of rising Chinese influence in Laos.

**Phill Wilcox** is a Research Associate in the Faculty of Sociology at Bielefeld University, Germany. Her book chapter 'Contested Heritage in Luang Prabang' was published as part of the Routledge Handbook of Urbanization in Southeast Asia in 2018.

<https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463727020/heritage-and-the-making-of-political-legitimacy-in-laos>



### Narrating Democracy in Myanmar: The Struggle Between Activists, Democratic Leaders and Aid Workers

Tamas Wells

ISBN: 978 94 6372 615 3  
Publication date: 14 May 2021 | Series: Global Asia

This book analyses what Myanmar's struggle for democracy has signified to Burmese activists and democratic leaders, and to their international allies. In doing so, it explores how understanding contested meanings of democracy helps make sense of the country's tortuous path since Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won historic elections in 2015. Using Burmese and English language sources, *Narrating Democracy in Myanmar* reveals how the country's ongoing struggles for democracy exist not only in opposition to Burmese military elites, but also within networks of local activists and democratic leaders, and international aid workers.

**Tamas Wells** is a Research Fellow in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne. His research focusses on meanings of democracy, governance, freedom and accountability in Southeast Asia and the role of international aid agencies. Before entering academia, he worked in Myanmar for six years with various NGOs – including Save the Children – on governance, public health and civil-society-strengthening programs.

<https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463726153/narrating-democracy-in-myanmar>

## IIAS Book Talk Series

We are excited to announce a new addition to our webinar series. From September, we are starting the 'IIAS Book Talks', dedicated to new titles published in the three IIAS publication series, 'Asian Heritages', 'Asian Cities' and 'Global Asia'. The author(s) or editor(s) will explain different aspects of their monograph or edited volume, after which time is reserved for questions from the audience. We welcome you to join these sessions and learn more about our latest books directly from the authors/ editors.

The IIAS Book Talk Series is organised by Mary Lynn van Dijk (publications officer), in collaboration with Wai Cheung (reviews coordinator of NewBooks.Asia) and Annemarie van Leeuwen, (lectures and outreach coordinator).

For information about the IIAS Publication Series, see [www.iias.asia/books](http://www.iias.asia/books)

IIAS organises webinars on a variety of Asia-related topics, held by IIAS fellows and other speakers, aimed at sharing knowledge and connecting people. All webinars and book talks (and updates to the schedule) are announced on our website at [www.iias.asia/events](http://www.iias.asia/events)

You are most welcome to join (free of charge) by registering online in advance. We will subsequently contact you with further information on how to participate.

A selection of our previous webinars can be viewed on our YouTube channel [www.youtube.com/asianstudies](http://www.youtube.com/asianstudies)

The following Book Talks have been confirmed (please check our website for up-to-date information).



23 September 2021  
*World Heritage and Urban Politics in Melaka, Malaysia. A Cityscape below the Winds*

Speaker:  
Pierpaolo De Giosa (author)  
Publication date:  
1 July 2021  
IIAS publication series:  
Asian Heritages



27 October 2021  
*Narrating Democracy in Myanmar. The Struggle Between Activists, Democratic Leaders and Aid Workers*

Speaker:  
Tamas Wells (author)  
Publication date:  
14 May 2021  
IIAS publication series:  
Global Asia



17 February 2022  
*Constructing Kanchi. City of Infinite Temples*

Speaker:  
Emma Natalya Stein (author)  
Publication date:  
15 October 2021  
IIAS publication series:  
Asian Cities



7 April 2022  
*Heritage and the Making of Political Legitimacy in Laos. The Past and Present of the Lao Nation*

Speaker:  
Phill Wilcox (author)  
Publication date:  
1 October 2021  
IIAS publication series:  
Asian Heritages

## The Newsletter: farewell Sonja, welcome Paramita and Benjamin

After ten years of serving as managing editor of The Newsletter, Sonja Zweegers has decided it is time to explore new challenges. We wish her all the best! Paramita Paul takes over as the new Chief Editor of The Newsletter. We also welcome Benjamin Linder as Assistant Editor of The Newsletter & NewBooks.Asia.



### A hearty farewell to Sonja Zweegers, Managing Editor of The Newsletter (2011-2021)

It has been already a decade since Sonja joined the IAS to take on the task of managing the institute's flagship The Newsletter. During her tenure, Sonja managed to considerably reinforce the periodical, not only by considerably expanding its readership - now above 60,000, with two-thirds online - but also by strengthening its editorial portfolio through a number of regular sections that make The Newsletter an essential vector of exchanges and scholarship in the realm of Asia Studies.

I would like to draw attention to one point in particular, for which I worked with Sonja, namely, the journal's capacity to host works from other players in the field by enabling regular contributions from partner institutions in different regions of Asia, and beyond, to promote work by local scholars there. Sometimes translated from other languages than English, these thematic dossiers have contributed significantly to IAS's public service sense of mission 'beyond borders', coming from Southeast Asia with the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies; from North-East Asia with Seoul National University Asia Centre; from China with New York University Shanghai and Fudan University; from Oceania with the University of Melbourne; or, more recently, from our partners in the European Alliance for Asian Studies. Sonja was very diligent in maintaining close personal connections with the partners, ensuring a steady flow of subjects being discussed in every issue.

Sonja helped transform The Newsletter into the highly professional specialised periodical it is today. She can confidently contemplate a new phase in her already rich career. Thank you and good luck Sonja!

Philippe Peycam, Director



### Meet Paramita Paul, Chief Editor of The Newsletter from July 2021

Paramita Paul is a Sinologist and art historian and holds a PhD (2009) from Leiden University. Her dissertation, entitled 'Wandering Saints: Chan Eccentrics in the Art and Culture of Song and Yuan China', was completed on a full scholarship from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). Her research interests include premodern and modern Zen and Buddhist art, and issues of art, heritage, and cultural identity.

Prior to joining IAS, Paramita taught courses in language, art history and visual

culture at Leiden University, Leiden University College the Hague, and Amsterdam University College. She has worked for cultural organisations, including the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. She will continue to serve as a member of the Editorial Board of *Aziatische Kunst*, the journal of the Royal Asian Art Society in the Netherlands (KVVAK).

As Chief Editor, and in collaboration with the editorial team, Paramita is excited about further developing The Newsletter into a more hybrid platform in order to enhance its role as an essential site for the Asian Studies community. What are Asian Studies today? How do we define the field? And who is the Asianist? With these questions in mind, she is looking forward to cooperating with current and prospective authors.



### Meet Benjamin Linder, Assistant Editor of The Newsletter and NewBooks.Asia from June 2021

Benjamin Linder is an anthropologist by training, with particular interests in cultural geography, urbanism, cosmopolitanism, and mobilities in South Asia. In 2019, he completed his PhD from the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he also received MA degrees in Anthropology (2013) and Environmental & Urban Geography (2018). His dissertation research focused on place-making, identity performance, and transnationalism in the urban enclave of Thamel (Kathmandu, Nepal). In October 2020, he moved to Leiden as a Research Fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), and he is very pleased to continue on as a member of the IIAS staff.

As Assistant Editor, Benjamin will primarily work on The Newsletter under the guidance of its new Chief Editor, Paramita Paul. He will also focus on book reviews for NewBooks.Asia, which will soon be merged and integrated with the IIAS website. Additionally, Benjamin is exploring the possibility of launching a podcast series for the institute in an effort to expand the reach and reception of our various programs. In his free time, he will continue to write and publish academically. Currently, he is working on two edited volumes as well as a monograph based on his dissertation.

### Other editors

The two other editors involved in The Newsletter are Sandra Dehue, who, as editor of the Network Pages, takes care of the news about the initiatives of IIAS, and Thomas Voorter, editor of The Newsletter online.

## IIAS/Rijksmuseum Amsterdam annual lecture and masterclass



Information and registration:  
[www.iias.asia/events](http://www.iias.asia/events)

IIAS collaborates with the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam to hold an annual public lecture, given by an invited expert, on Asian material art in the context of broader Asian history. In addition, the speaker gives a masterclass for advanced students, going deeper into the scientific context and meaning.

This year's lecture and masterclass will be delivered by Dr Christian Luczanits, the David L. Snellgrove Senior Lecturer in Tibetan and Buddhist Art at the Department of History of Art and Archaeology, SOAS, University of London.

### Masterclass *Mandalas Intertwined – Reading the Tabo Main Temple*

By Dr Christian Luczanits  
Date: 4 November 2021, 15.00-17:00  
Venue: Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands

### Public lecture *The Vajradhātu Mandala – Variations on a Theme of Early Esoteric Buddhism*

By Dr Christian Luczanits  
Date: 5 November 2021, 15:30-17:00  
Venue: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

## Call for papers

### Journal of Governance, Security & Development

An International Journal Focusing on South Asia

JGSD is a forum for scholarly research and policy-oriented analyses on various dimensions of society, politics, economy, public policy, public administration, and security with a focus on South Asia. The journal covers conceptually-interesting original cross-disciplinary research and policy-driven essays in each of the three areas – governance, security and development.

The Journal solicits manuscripts (research-based articles, review articles, research notes, and book reviews) for its forthcoming issues. Submissions must be original and must not be under consideration by any other journal. All manuscripts must be prepared in accordance with the APA referencing style. Manuscripts will be blind-reviewed and checked for originality.

For further information go to:  
<https://jgsd.cgs-bd.com>

## Keynote speech

### Frontiers of Gentrification: Perspectives from Asia

1 Sept 2021, 10:00-11:30 Amsterdam Time (CEST)

On 1 September 2021, Professor Hyun Bang SHIN will deliver the keynote address to the UKNA symposium 'Neighborhood Transformation in East Asian Cities: Is 'Gentrification' the right frame of reference?' This keynote speech is an open pre-event for the otherwise closed symposium.

Hyun Bang SHIN is Professor of Geography and Urban Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and Director of the Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre at LSE. His research centres on the critical analysis of the political economy of urbanisation; politics of displacement; gentrification; housing; the right to the city; urban spectacles; speculative urbanism, with particular attention to cities in Asian

countries such as China, South Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore. His most recent projects on circulating urbanism and Asian capital involve field research in Quito, Manila, Iskandar Malaysia, Kuwait City and London. His recent books include *Global Gentrifications: Uneven Development and Displacement* (2015, Policy Press), *Planetary Urbanism, Contested Cities and Housing in Asia* (2019, Palgrave Macmillan), and *Exporting Urban Korea? Reconsidering the Korean Urban Development Experience* (2020, Routledge). He is currently working on two book manuscripts, *Making China Urban* (for Routledge) and another on the making of the speculative city of Seoul.

Information and registration:  
<https://www.iias.asia/events/frontiers-gentrification-perspectives-asia>



# Ruptured space allows Myanmar youths to reimagine a new education system

Tharaphi Than

Since the February coup, students in Myanmar have emerged as the invisible leaders of the resistance. They are boycotting the prevailing university education system and envisioning an alternative education site, free from institutional bureaucracies, disciplinary hierarchies, and a gate-keeping mentality. One proposed model is the Virtual Federal University (VFU), led by members of the Yangon University Students' Union (UYSU), which aligns well with the decolonial methodologies, the new thematic curriculum development, and collaborative education model of the IAS Humanities Across Borders (HAB) program.

The February 1st coup in Myanmar is the single most destructive force in recent years, one that destroyed everything built during the nascent democratic period between 2011 and 2021. For many minority areas, particularly Kachin and Karen, it was the third tragedy—the first two being the 70-year-old civil war and COVID-19—that denied hope that all the war refugees and the internally might return home and rebuild lives. The Bamar majority on the plains now shares the collective suffering that dominated the highlands throughout the 20th century.

There is profound sadness and outrage; misery and shame; bewilderment and hopelessness. Amidst all this mix of intense feelings, many also have realized that there arrived a ruptured space, like a fertile ground after a volcano eruption, where new lives sprout, rising like the proverbial phoenix. It will be sheer romanticism and even an insensitive intellectual exercise to extol the coup as a harbinger of new things. Nevertheless, the coup teaches both Myanmar and the world many lessons, and youth are showing us how to collectively reset the old and corrupt system, by daring to seize the opportunity of the open space of rupture.

As this article goes to press in July 2021, young people are at the forefront of the resistance movement that is still unfolding five months after the coup. They continue to mobilize flash protests in cities, to undergo military training in Ethnic Armed Organizations-controlled areas (such as Karen, Karenni, and Kachin regions), and, more importantly, to educate the public that two popular options—reinstating the Aung San Suu Kyi-led government or striving for piecemeal progress under the military—are both untenable. Initially rejected by the majority of the population pre-coup, many radical nation-building ideas of the youth are now in circulation among the general public. To youths, federal democracy, not diarchic democracy' espoused by the National League for Democracy (NLD) nor disciplined democracy endorsed by the army, is the path towards unity between Bamars and minorities, towards stability for both Bamar-dominated heartlands and minorities' highlands, towards equity for all and prosperity for both elites and the oppressed.

The military tends to portray youth activists as naive and easily influenced by the political parties, particularly by the leftists. The NLD, on the other hand, treats youth activists as troublemakers, constantly challenging the authority and the status quo. The international community frame them

as 'the unrealistic', daring to challenge the unchallengeable. Nevertheless, it is the youth who dare to talk back to the military, the NLD, and the international community. As drivers of the revolution, they have unfettered hopes for the country. Their goals are not means-adjusted, nor is their vision limited by material resources or available international support. The many unpopular slogans they created in February have captured the public's imagination since June. Radical claims such as 'Uproot the Fascist Army', 'Rise up when oppressed', 'Strike back when attacked' set the tone of the resistance and showed the country the tenor of self-defence and the options for protest and resistance. Always ahead of the general public, young people, particularly union members of different universities across the country, are gradually emerging as the invisible leaders of the resistance. One of the powerful tools they employ against the coup regime is mobilizing their fellow students to boycott the prevailing university education system.

## Reimagining education

Education systems around the world are often centralized and hierarchical. Governments take a paternalistic role to decide for their young generations what is best for them. In Myanmar, historically,

the first and foremost goal of the education system has been to produce skilled and good citizens for the State. Education in this context and philosophy is rather like a factory assembly line to reproduce the status quo that benefits a few. Conformity and a lack of deviation are the principles behind the state-controlled education system. Outside schools across the country, green and white words 'Attitude, Discipline, Knowledge' greet every student. Knowledge is neither objective, nor is it to serve individuals. It is subject to the State's nation-building plans, and for Myanmar it is to sustain the idea of a nation centered on the interests of the Buddhist Burman majority. Education is merely a political wing of the post-colonial Burman State's project to divide and rule between Bamars and minorities. As Aung Py writes in *Mawkun*, minority students face everyday discrimination and a sense of powerlessness in state schools, be they in Burmans' heartlands or minorities' highlands.<sup>2</sup> Schools with politicized curricula cannot provide a safe space for children, and minorities are reminded of their un-belonging in society.

These structural injustices reinforced by institutions such as schools and universities have been invisible to the public. Because curricula and everyday interactions with students and teachers normalize the exclusionary policies and practices of the

State, different values are attached to different individuals based on their race, ethnicity, religion, ability, and sexual orientation. Such practices are generally accepted as standards to protect the interests of society. Parents interpret the government's school policies and practices as 'good intentions', particularly those implemented by the Aung San Suu Kyi-led government, as the State won the trust of the public. Trust obscures injustices. Faith prolongs inaction.

Union students, on the other hand, have always been critical of governments. From the independence time through the Socialist era to the current revolutionary period, union students pressurized successive governments to reform education to serve them and the public rather than the State. Today, as never before, the education system is on the brink of collapse or has the biggest potential for seismic change, depending on how one interprets the current situation. Students' manifold criticisms on the pre-coup NLD government, from the internet shutdown to the defence of the genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to the educational reforms in 2014, have largely been justified. The coup proved that students were right to be critical of the government that conceded to the army without making many political gains. When the general public was seen to be repeating students' demands, it proved that the former had now won public support, and that their movement was gaining ground as a force of resistance.

### What next for the students?

University students have formed Interim Education Councils to reimagine education. They held public discussions with students online to envision a federal education to support federal democracy. Federalism is a political goal of many minorities. Shy of independence, for which a few groups such as Karen National Union have been fighting through their 'Free Karen State' or 'Kawthoolei'

unification motto, federalism is what many minorities think can guarantee equity, dignity, and prosperity. Ironically, federalism was promoted in minority areas mostly during the democratic period, a strange arrangement by many well-intentioned NGOs and educational institutions. As a consequence, Bamar had little chance to learn about federalism and the shared dream of being together in the Union or *Pyidaungsu*. In their attempt to reclaim education, union students (mostly Bamar) first declared they want 'Federal Education' that is inclusive of everyone and centers students' voices in running universities.

Though many liberated areas have been experimenting with independent education systems free of government intervention, Bamar-dominated areas are yet to experience similar systems. Independent universities mean private ones in Bamar areas, and private means elite in a neoliberal context catering to those with money. So, what does an independent, autonomous, and federal university mean to students? What are their demands for the government and politicians? More importantly, what is their alternative education model like?

To be able to answer such questions, it is important to understand the site of education, i.e., physical buildings and compounds called schools and universities, and the nature of student bodies that occupy this site that collectively pose a credible threat to governments, particularly dictators. The most violent destruction of the material and symbolic student power is the dynamiting of the student union's building on the campus of Yangon University on the 7th of July, 1962, by order of General Ne Win. A physical gathering of students always threatens dictators since students and the site of education historically remain relatively uncontaminated by neoliberal corporate agendas and politics. Students still feel empowered to demand change through education. Ruptured space opened up by the coup expedited such an action. Rather

than fighting for liberation individually, students through unions and groups strive to establish a parallel education system with many autonomous universities to counter the centralized coup education system. Online platforms and lessons necessitated by the pandemic make it possible to reimagine an alternative education away from traditional brick and mortar education.

As some US university students demanded change in their curricula after the 2008 financial crisis and after the emergence of the Black Lives Matter Movement, Myanmar students are now envisioning an alternative education. One proposed model is espoused by Virtual Federal University (VFU), led by members of the University of Yangon Students' Union (UYSU). Three principles underpinned VFU. They are 1) to experiment with a learning and teaching model that will facilitate the federal education system; 2) to provide free education; and 3) to center students' voices and demands in the operation of the University. For a country like Myanmar that avoids federalism for fear of a break-up, mobilizing students towards federalism via education can be interpreted as an overtly political act. However, federalism must be understood in terms of everyday civic actions. That includes how different students interact with each other, how educators view their students, and how classes promote self-esteem, dignity, and a sense of belonging in a community. Through carefully selected lessons, modes of delivery, and interactions, VFU aims to foster federal conversations and practices, and to build a federal democratic country from the bottom up.

### Partners

Since its inception in early May 2021, VFU has created lessons that can be downloaded online. To offer education in areas without internet, it seeks to partner with radio stations, TV stations, and local learning hubs. VFU lessons vary from Molecular Biology to Critical

Reading to Myths about Burmese History. VFU educators and translators donate their talents and time to provide a wide range of lessons for different language speakers of Burma, an arduous task for a university that does not aim to depend on financial donations. Through different international partners, such as the Global History Lab of Princeton University, it aims to offer certificate courses to selected students. The decolonial methodologies, new thematic curriculum development, and collaborative education model of the IIAS Humanities Across Borders initiative resonates with the VFU's mission. HaB envisions new critical spaces of education free of institutional bureaucracies, disciplinary hierarchies, and gate-keeping mindsets, like the one forged by the youth in Myanmar.

The Covid pandemic has accelerated online learning education activities. However, if VFU is to succeed, global educational institutions, individual educators, and activists must believe in the possibility of a free site of education to help change a social order, transform politics and most of all, usher in a new way of learning and teaching for everyone.

Tharaphi Than is an Associate Professor at Northern Illinois University, USA, and a volunteer at Virtual Federal University [www.federaluniversity.org](http://www.federaluniversity.org)

### Notes

- 1 For more on diarchic arrangement and youth-led movement, see Jordt, Ingrid, Than, Tharaphi, Sue Ye Lin, How Generation Z galvanised a revolutionary movement against Myanmar's 2021 military coup, Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, May 2021.
- 2 Aung Py. (2019) 'မန္တလေးမြို့ကြီးပြိုင်အစ စတင်ကျင်းပ' [Burman chauvinism begins at schools] *Mawkun*, vol. 68

## Humanities Across Borders (HAB) curriculum development

Aarti Kawlra

The second phase of the Humanities Across Borders programme has now begun with the consortium partners in the process of signing a curriculum development agreement to further the vision set out in the HAB manifesto that was jointly drafted in Chiang Mai just before the worldwide lockdown early last year. HAB's model of curricula development attends to community-based lived or experiential knowledge often relegated to the margins as non-expert knowledge. HAB's manifesto describes this in its preamble:

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

This pedagogical vision will guide HAB's early steps in the institutionalisation of its trans-regional and transdisciplinary education agenda over the next five years. Four syllabi tracks based on themes of universal meaning (food, craft-making, words-in-use, space/place) animate HAB's collaborative curricula development plan, to be co-created with local partners, in dialogue with other localities in the network. Four anchor institutions on four continents have been identified to

develop these tracks to form the *in situ* HAB curriculum: the University of Ghana, Legon; Ambedkar University, Delhi; Leiden University College, The Hague; and Kenyon College, Ohio. Each will take the lead on one of these themes.

### HAB at ICAS

To further advance syllabi creation, the consortium will leverage its participation at ICAS12. Although the partners cannot be physically reunited like in 2019 during ICAS11, the network will reconvene remotely from August 24-28. HAB is convening the following roundtables to discuss situated methodologies along the themes of rice, indigo, food and place-making:

#### Rice as method: a humanities across borders syllabi in-the-making

The discussion intends to explore rice related legacies, resiliencies and revivals in a trans-regional context. It will be an occasion to discuss how to archive memories, biographies and narratives around rice – techniques, seed conservation, varieties, irrigation, crop cycle, riots, rituals – towards a repository of agro-ecological cartographies where community-based knowledge of rice and other staples forms the basis for humanities-grounded syllabi across participating institutions.

#### Place, nature and indigo

We take the case of the indigo production process to see how the nexus of an object, practice, peoples and nature achieve the weight of politics (be it in environmental movements, in heritage-making or sustaining livelihoods) in specific contexts. The idea is to

build a set of parameters towards a teaching manual similar to the craft practitioners manual but adapted for the humanities and social sciences. The workshop outcome will also be a syllabus using indigo as a method and pedagogy beyond the confines of the textbook and the classroom.

#### The most urgent of revolutions: the food issue as decolonisation

The principle of continuity of life and the social value of food is increasingly becoming the core of resistance to the world's capitalist order. We see the emergence of multiple communities seeking to reappropriate their food sovereignty. These communities are the crucible of relevant decolonial experiences as well as spaces for caring for the commons. They can be found, in various forms, from one continent to another, waltzing between ingenious innovations, revaluation of culinary heritages, occupations and creation of gardens and popular restaurants, but also confronted, many times, with repression of various kinds. On the basis of the first session, the goal is to attempt the collective and trans-regional writing of syllabi in the form of textbooks.

#### Mobility, memory and livelihood: a trans-regional course/text on place-making

The overarching aim is to make the lens of place-making legible for students and educators through the vast spectrum of everyday realities, contradictions and connections encountered through 'place' in local, regional, and global contexts. In what ways does 'place' enable/disable mobilities across borders? And, for a more intersectional, humanist approach

to migration and human futures, can we gain a granular understanding of how livelihoods are negotiated through place-making across national boundaries; urban/rural divides; segregated urban neighbourhoods; forests, hills and plains; sea and shorelines?

#### Pedagogies of Intersectionality

This additional HAB roundtable brings together scholars interested in intersectionality not only as an analytical framework but also as critical pedagogies of the present. We have been witnessing a multitude of injustices and acts of hatred and apathy that defy interpretation. We ask participants to reflect upon how they have responded in their teaching and research practice to the violence and volatility of identity-based precarity exacerbated by the pandemic the world over. There is an urgent need to bring the overlapping experiences of oppression, both overt and covert, into the curriculum.

<https://www.iias.asia/programmes/hab>



# IIAS Research, Networks, and Initiatives

IIAS research and other initiatives are carried out within a number of thematic, partially overlapping research clusters in phase with contemporary Asian currents and built around the notion of social agency. In addition, IIAS remains open to other potentially significant topics. More information: [www.iias.asia](http://www.iias.asia)

## IIAS research clusters

### Asian Cities

This cluster deals with cities and urban cultures with their issues of flows and fluxes, ideas and goods, and cosmopolitanism and connectivity at their core, framing the existence of vibrant 'civil societies' and political micro-cultures. Through an international knowledge network, IIAS aims to create a platform for scholars and urban practitioners focusing on Asian cities 'in context' and beyond traditional western norms of knowledge.

### Asian Heritages

This cluster focuses on the uses of culture and cultural heritage practices in Asia. In particular, it addresses a variety of definitions associated with cultural heritage and their implications for social agency. The cluster engages with a broad range of related concepts and issues, including the contested assertions of 'tangible' and 'intangible', concepts such as 'authenticity', 'national heritage' and 'shared heritage', and, in general, with issues pertaining to the political economy of heritage.

### Global Asia

Asia has a long history of transnational linkages with other parts of the world, thereby shaping the global order, as much as the world at large continues to shape Asia. The Global Asia Cluster addresses contemporary issues related to Asia's projection into the world as well as trans-national interactions within the Asian region itself. In addition IIAS aims to help develop a more evenly balanced field of Asian Studies by collaborating in trans-regional capacity building initiatives and by working on new types of methodological approaches that encourage synergies and interactions between disciplines, regions and practices.



## Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA)

The Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA) is an inclusive network that brings together concerned scholars and practitioners engaged in collaborative research and events on cities in Asia. It seeks to influence policy by contributing insights that put people at the centre of urban governance and development strategies. The UKNA Secretariat is at IIAS, but the network comprises universities and planning institutions across China, India, Southeast Asia and Europe. Its current flagship project is the Southeast Asia Neighbourhoods Network (SEANNET).

### Symposium

'Neighborhood Transformation in East Asian Cities: Is 'Gentrification' the Right Frame of Reference?', 7-9 Nov 2021, Chiba, Japan.

<https://ukna.asia/events/neighborhood-transformation-east-asian-cities-gentrification-right-frame-reference>

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

Coordinator: Paul Rabé

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

Clusters: Asian Cities; Asian Heritages

SEANNET is a community of scholars and practitioners with an interest in cities in Southeast Asia through the prism of the neighborhood. Supported by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, NY (2017-2021), case studies are carried out in six selected cities in Southeast Asia (Mandalay, Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Manila, Surabaya). In the second phase (2022-2027, also supported by the Henry Luce Foundation), SEANNET will be led by Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), and the number of case studies and activities will be expanded. SEANNET seeks to engage the humanistic social sciences in a dialogue

## Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network (SEANNET)

with urban stake-holders as co-contributors of alternative knowledge about cities. This is done through a combination of participatory field-research, in-situ roundtables, workshops, conferences, publications and new forms of pedagogy developed in collaboration with local institutions of learning. Our second ambition is to help shape and empower a community of early-career scholars and practitioners working on and from Southeast Asia. The SEANNET research teams comprise international and local scholars, students from local universities, and civil society representatives, all working together with the neighbourhood residents.

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

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

and Rita Padawangi Singapore University of Social Sciences [ritapadawangi@suss.edu.sg](mailto:ritapadawangi@suss.edu.sg)

Cluster: Asian Cities



## The Forum on Health, Environment and Development (FORHEAD)

The Forum on Health, Environment and Development (FORHEAD) is an interdisciplinary network that brings together natural, medical and social scientists to explore the implications of environmental and social change for public health in China and beyond.

[www.iias.asia/programmes/forhead](http://www.iias.asia/programmes/forhead)

Coordinator: Jennifer Holdaway

[j.a.holdaway.2@iias.nl](mailto:j.a.holdaway.2@iias.nl)

Cluster: Global Asia



## Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe

Initiated by IIAS, this programme involves Leiden University in the Netherlands, two Institutes at National Taiwan University in Taiwan and one at Yonsei University in South Korea. Discussions with other possible partners in Asia are ongoing. The programme offers selected students the opportunity to follow a full year study at one of the partner institutes with full credits and a double degree. The curriculum at Leiden University benefits from the contributions of Prof Michael Herzfeld (Harvard) as a guest teacher and the Senior Advisor to the Critical Heritage Studies Initiative of IIAS.

[www.iias.asia/programmes/critical-heritage-studies](http://www.iias.asia/programmes/critical-heritage-studies)

Coordinator: Elena Paskaleva

[e.g.paskaleva@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:e.g.paskaleva@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

Cluster: Asian Heritages





## Humanities Across Borders

Supported by another five-year grant cycle from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, we plan to institutionalise 'Humanities Across Borders' (HAB) as a collaborative model of higher education within our network of university partners in parts of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas. We are now in the process of signing a Consortium Member's Agreement to further the vision set out in the jointly drafted pedagogical Manifesto, whose preamble is as follows:

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

In the coming years, we will organise ourselves into a membership-based consortium, expand the programme's outreach, and formalise and apply HAB's in situ or place-based methodologies to real-world societal and ecological concerns by developing a common curriculum, implemented in a trans-regional setting. By disseminating HAB's locally situated yet globally connected approach to teaching and learning - through the consortium's website and online repository, publications, conferences, and pedagogical events - we hope to encourage other institutions in the global South and North to join our efforts.

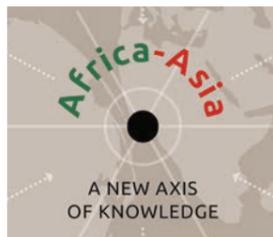
In this issue see page 51: Humanities Across Borders Curriculum Development.

Follow the stories on the [Humanities Across Borders Blog](https://humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog) [humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog](https://humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog)

[www.iias.asia/hab](https://www.iias.asia/hab)

Clusters: [Global Asia](#); [Asian Heritages](#)

## Africa-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge



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

[www.iias.asia/networks/africa-asia](https://www.iias.asia/networks/africa-asia)

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## Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN)



This network focuses particularly on the border regions between South Asia, Central/East and Southeast Asia. The concerns are varied, ranging from migratory movements, transformations in cultural, linguistic and religious practices, to ethnic mobilisation and conflict, marginalisation, and environmental concerns. ABRN organises a conference in one of these border regions every two years in co-operation with a local partner.

The 7th ABRN conference, 'Borderland Futures: Technologies, Zones, Co-existences', has been postponed until June 2022.

[www.asianborderlands.net](https://www.asianborderlands.net)

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## Energy Programme Asia (EPA)

The current joint research programme between IAS-EPA and the Institute of World Politics and Economy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing is entitled *The Political Economy of the Belt & Road Initiative and its Reflections*. It aims to investigate the policy, policy tools, and impacts of China's Belt and Road Initiative. By focusing on China's involvement with governments, local institutions, and local stakeholders, it aims to examine the subsequent responses to China's activities from the local to the global-geopolitical level in the following countries: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Hungary, the West Balkans, and Russia.

[www.iias.asia/programmes/energy-programme-asia](https://www.iias.asia/programmes/energy-programme-asia)

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## 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-organise conferences, workshops and academic exchanges with institutions from the region. Together with IAS, the Centre facilitates an inclusive and global platform bringing together scholars and institutions working on connections and comparisons across the axis of human interaction with an interest in scholarship that cuts across borders of places, periods and disciplines.

[www.iias.asia/programmes/leiden-centre-indian-ocean-studies](https://www.iias.asia/programmes/leiden-centre-indian-ocean-studies)

Cluster: [Global Asia](#)

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

The International Institute for Asian Studies has recently started a new project of interdisciplinary research aimed at the study of the Belt and Road Initiative of the Chinese government, with special attention given to the impact of the 'New Silk Road' on countries, regions and peoples outside of China.

[www.iias.asia/programmes/newsilkroad](https://www.iias.asia/programmes/newsilkroad)

Cluster: [Global Asia](#)

## International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS)



With its biennial conferences, International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) is the largest global forum for academics and civil society exchange on Asia. Founded in 1997 at the initiative of IAS, ICAS serves as a platform for scholars, social and cultural leaders, and institutions focusing on issues critical to Asia, and, by implication, the rest of the world. The ICAS biennial conferences are organised in cooperation with local universities, cities and institutions and attended by scholars and other experts, institutions and publishers from 60 countries. ICAS also organises

the biennial 'ICAS Book Prize' (IBP), which awards the most prestigious prizes in the field of Asian Studies for books in Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish; and for PhD Theses in English. Eleven conventions have been held since 1997 (Leiden, Berlin, Singapore, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Daejeon, Honolulu, Macao, Adelaide, Chiang Mai and Leiden).

ICAS12 - Crafting a Global Future, 24-28 August 2021. Organised together with Kyoto Seika University, Japan. [www.icas.asia](https://www.icas.asia)





# Scaling the Dark

## A Conversation with Issam Kourbaj

Paramita Paul

### EXHIBITION

Fleeing the Dark

### DATE

Until 3 October 2021

### LOCATION

Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands

### FURTHER INFORMATION

<https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/fleeing-dark>



Fig. 1 (above): *Scaling the Dark: Seeds, Sands, Moons* (detail), Issam Kourbaj, 2021. 4381 boats varying in size from a couple of centimeters to tens of centimeters, made from drink cans, bicycle mudguards, charred seeds, burnt matches, and sand. Photograph courtesy of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

Fig. 2 (left): *Roemeria hybrida*, page from Leonhard Rauwolf's *Herbarium*, collected 1574-1576, Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Leiden. Photograph courtesy of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

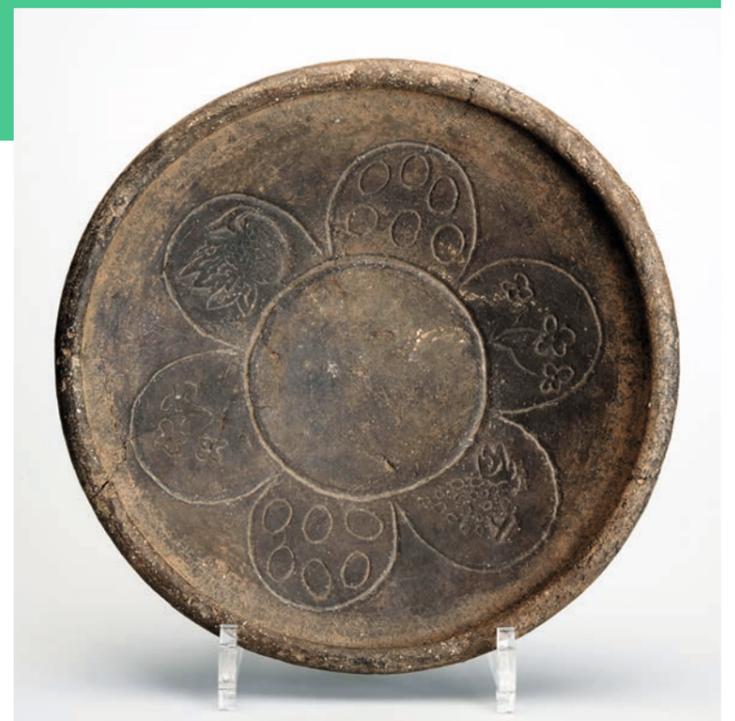
Fig. 3 (below): Clay bowl with carved decoration depicting the "seed-flower-fruit-seed" cycle. Before 1963. Purchased from H.A.A.M. Wirtz, TM-3317-19. Photograph courtesy of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

2021 marks ten years since the Syrian uprising. On March 15, 2011, protesters took to the streets of Damascus to demand democratic reforms from the Syrian government. The protests turned into a massive nationwide movement that was soon countered by extreme violence from the government, police, and security forces. Ever since, millions of Syrians have been forced to flee their homes. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Syrian crisis is currently the largest displacement crisis in the world, with 13.4 million people in need of humanitarian protection and assistance in Syria, and 6.6 million refugees worldwide.<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has only added to this devastation and has increased the vulnerability of Syrians living inside Syria as well as those in exile.

In his exhibition "Fleeing the Dark" at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, Syrian-born artist Issam Kourbaj draws attention to the experience of tragedy, destruction, and forced migration through an intervention with objects from the Tropenmuseum, the National Museum of Antiquities (Leiden), and the Naturalis Biodiversity Center (Leiden). This issue's Portrait section introduces Kourbaj and his work, and includes an interview with the artist, in which we discussed his reflections on the exhibition, on some of its objects, and on questions of trauma and hope.

### Issam Kourbaj

Issam Kourbaj was born in Suweida in Southern Syria in 1963. He trained at the Institute of Fine Arts in Damascus, the Repin Institute of Fine Arts in Leningrad, and the Wimbledon School of Art in London. Kourbaj



is a Lector in Art at Christ's College, and has lived and worked in Cambridge since the 1990s. Since 2011, Kourbaj has been dedicated to raising awareness and money for projects and aid in Syria through exhibitions, installations, and performances in the UK and abroad.

## Intervention

At the Tropenmuseum, Kourbaj's intervention starts with the installation *Scaling the Dark: Seeds, Sands, Moons* in the museum's grand central atrium (Fig. 1). The installation features small boats made of recycled material and placed on a platform. The biggest 122 boats, one for every month lost to the Syrian conflict, carry spent matches that reflect the trauma that many Syrians carry with them. 532 medium-size boats, one for every week since 2011, carry sand to represent Syria's destroyed monuments and a once shared cultural history. 3727 small boats, one for every day lost to the conflict, carry charred seeds in response to the destroyed Seed Bank in Aleppo. Compared to the size of the atrium, *Scaling the Dark* is modest, and it requires careful attention from the viewer: the different types of boats and their content can only be seen clearly if you come close and bend down.

The platform is placed diagonally and leads into the exhibition, which has also been set up along a diagonal axis. In the space surrounding this diagonal, we see projections on the floor and wall, and objects suspended in the air or placed in cases. *Strike* is a digital video projection on the floor of an image of matches that are simultaneously collected and burnt – resembling a nest that is built and immediately destroyed. It is a performance in response to airstrikes and barrel bombs. A door from a house in Aleppo, hanging in the air, creates a border between the tragedy happening inside Syria and its outcome, the exodus. Cases contain objects such as bread stamps – stamps used to mark a family's bread in a communal oven – with an Arabic inscription that is the equivalent of "Eat well!". A stamp from the museum's collection from the medieval period is placed next to one made by Kourbaj that says "The Breadline is a Frontline", referring to the scarcity of bread as well as to the Syrians killed while queuing for bread. Seeds play a central role in the exhibition, particularly at the end of the diagonal in the Herbarium room. This room holds the *Rauwolf Herbarium*, opened at the page of the *Roemeria hybrida*, or violet-horned poppy flower (Fig. 2). The *Rauwolf Herbarium* was named after the German physician and botanist Leonhard Rauwolf (1535-1596), who collected and documented the plants he saw on his travels through the Near East. Pages from the *Herbarium* are projected onto the wall opposite the book and show the plants collected around Aleppo, including pomegranates and daffodils. The *Roemeria hybrida*, which grows on rough terrain, is a metaphor for the Syrian people.

## Interview

On July 15, 2021, Issam Kourbaj and I met for an interview. I asked Kourbaj about his reasons for an exhibition in the form of an intervention, about objects and bigger stories, and about connections between language, seeds, and violent displacement. Sarah Johnson, curator of the Middle East and North Africa collections, could not be present for the interview, but she answered the first question via e-mail.

Paramita Paul (PP): Issam Kourbaj and Sarah Johnson, I am curious to know what inspired you to design this exhibition and why you decided on an intervention?



Issam Kourbaj (IK): I am interested in responding to objects and in how objects send out stimuli and invite different kinds of approaches. When I visited Leiden in November 2019, I saw the *Rauwolf Herbarium*. I was also introduced to the collections of the Tropenmuseum and the first object I saw was a bowl from Aleppo (Fig. 3). I was very happy to compare the plants, included with their roots in the *Herbarium*, to the cycle of life depicted on the bowl, but I hadn't planned anything in particular. I only started thinking about an exhibition at Sarah Johnson's suggestion, and, over the course of a year, we looked at 80 objects.

For my selection of objects, I felt it was important that the narrative I created spoke to the space, the theme I was interested in, and to something that anyone could identify with. I wanted to design an intervention because I was interested in the chemistry between objects and in how the aura that surrounds an object interacts with and charges the aura of other objects.

Sarah Johnson: I was inspired to design this exhibition with Issam because of the way he thought about the objects in our collection. For example, he reimagined a humble bowl collected in a market in Aleppo in a way that makes people stop and think. His work is not obvious or flashy. It requires people to observe and reflect. I also thought that this might be a good way to ask visitors to remember the conflict in Syria that is still ongoing.

PP: Indeed, the exhibition is not just an intervention in the museum, but also in our daily lives, as we are reminded of the ongoing violence. I am also thinking about how some of these objects intervene with the bigger stories you present. For instance, if we think of *Scaling the Dark*, why is it important to scale darkness and time through the boats? Is it to maintain determination in the present, or to count the days until light and change?

IK: The exhibition was originally called "Scaling the Dark" because in English, "scaling" is connected to both "measurement" and "climbing". There is no equivalent for this word in Dutch, so we changed the title of the intervention to "Fleeing the Dark". The boats scale time to commemorate a decade of violence that should not have happened in the first place, but, in the museum, they coexist with the seeds, which I see as a condensed universe. I wanted the boats to act as a teaser for viewers to find out about bigger stories. These stories are universal, for instance when we use violence to deal with issues across the planet. As an artist, I am not interested in finger-pointing, but in questioning the viewer. What do 10 years mean for someone living

Fig. 4 (below): *Sole-less*, Issam Kourbaj, 2018. Soleless shoes and road sign. Photograph courtesy of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

Fig. 5 (top): *Don't wash your hands: neither light agrees to enter the eyes nor air in the lungs*, Issam Kourbaj, 2021. 10 eye-idols made from Aleppo soap. Photograph courtesy of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

Fig. 6 (right): Eye-idol, Syria, 3100 BCE. Alabaster. National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden. Photograph courtesy of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.



in a refugee camp or among destruction? I needed to connect this tragedy to the life contained in seeds using the "voices" of different artworks that stimulate the viewer differently, for instance in the form of a digital projection or a suspended object. Also, the scale of the objects is insignificant compared to the space surrounding them in the museum, so the word "scale" applies to space as well as time. I wanted people to have whispering conversations with my objects.

PP: Some everyday objects look very different, making the intervention both real and confrontational. I am referring to the sole-less shoes (Fig. 4). While the boats connect to bigger ideas of time and darkness, these objects come close to everyday experience. Can you comment on their tangibility?

IK: In my childhood, I used to eat with a spoon that was once a bomb. My uncle dismantled the bombs left by the French in Syria in the 1920s and turned them into spoons. My idea of tweaking an object and turning it into something completely different comes from this experience. The shoe is an everyday object, but when you cut out its sole or root, a simple act performed by border security guards to prevent migrants from crossing into Europe, this creates immense trauma. I like to question the material itself and how its agency becomes part of the artwork's meaning. I revisit abandoned objects and converse with them. They speak to me and to others, as people identify with them. The tangibility of the objects functions as a hook, through which I ask viewers: "You know these objects, but take a closer look". I invite them to project their readings onto my work.

PP: The Aleppo soaps that you have carved in the form of ancient eye-idols also connect to the past (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). What role does the past play and what kind of conversations do you have with the past through these objects?

IK: The past is one of the different voices through which I want to tell my story. When I looked at the eye-idols, votive objects that date back 5000 years, I wanted to ask about the future of my past. The idols were found near Tell Brak, located only 400 km from Aleppo. Aleppo, famous for its soap, is a UNESCO heritage site now destroyed by war. I felt that the eye-idols and the soap were connected to each other through their connections to the past. Also, soap and cleanliness are significant across cultures, and I wanted the

soaps to provoke. I did not want to copy the eye-idols, so I carved the soaps blindfolded. Suddenly, they became vulnerable and spoke of human tragedy. Through them, in a time when we are asked to wash our hands, I ask viewers not to wash their hands of Syria.

PP: My final question concerns the seeds that are present throughout the exhibition. In your transcriptions of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's (1941-2008) poem, they are connected to words. Darwish says that both seeds and language are difficult to bring with you when you are forcefully displaced. What, then, do the seeds represent to you? Are they a source of hope or loss?

IK: In my childhood, I learnt calligraphy from my brother. Arabic makes use of dots, but this is a recent development. In earlier forms of Arabic, the same word can mean many things because of the absence of dots. I made a connection between missing seeds and missing dots, and in my poem *Leave to Remain: A Single Syrian Grain, Airborne*, I use Arabic without dots. In the Herbarium Room, I wanted to emphasize the relation between seeds, words, and healing. At the end of the exhibition, you are asked to go outside and see the seeds from Syria that have been planted on the museum's terrace and are living objects in the exhibition. I am interested in different media, and words and seeds are part of that, too. The seeds have become part of the war: wheat fields were destroyed in Syria and the Seed Bank in Aleppo was bombed. ICARDA, the International Center for Agriculture Research in the Dry Areas, has now planted ancient Syrian seeds kept in the Seed Vault in Norway in Lebanon and Morocco and this is something I wanted to honor and celebrate. Still, the seeds do not represent either a "naïve hope" or "loss" to me. Hope is an overused word. I prefer "the possibility of a different future".

For more information on the artist, please see: <http://issamkourbaj.co.uk> I thank Issam Kourbaj and Sarah Johnson for their cooperation.

Paramita Paul is Chief Editor of The Newsletter. [p.paul@ias.nl](mailto:p.paul@ias.nl)

## Notes

- <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>. Last accessed: 18.7.2021



# china

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