

NO. 85

The Newsletter



The Study
Surrounded
by slogans



The Focus
Recentring
the Bay
of Bengal



ICAS 12
Crafting a
Global Future



International
Institute for
Asian Studies

From the Director

- 3 Beyond the 'competitive' model

ICAS 12

- 4 Crafting a Global Future

The Study

- 5 Representing Asia in the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum in Taiwan
Susan Shih Chang
- 6-7 Teachers, missionaries, and activists. Female religious leadership and social mobility in Southeast Asia, 1920s-1960s
Iris Busschers, Kirsten Kamphuis and David Kloos
- 8-9 A medical dynasty. The Badmaevs and the Trans-Siberian knowledge corridor
Emilia Roza Sulek
- 10-11 Between 'green lies' in Germany and organic agriculture in Indonesia
Patrick Keilbart and Dimas D. Laksmana
- 12-13 Surrounded by slogans. Perpetual protest in public space during the Hong Kong 2019 protests
Milan Ismail
- 14-15 Negotiating a global identity
Chahida Bouhamou and Cha-Hsuan Liu

The Region

- 16-20 News from the European Alliance
- 21-23 News from Northeast Asia

The Review

- 24-25 Selected reviews from newbooks.asia
- 26-27 New reviews on newbooks.asia
- 28 New titles on newbooks.asia

The Focus

- 29-31 Recentering the Bay of Bengal. Connected spaces in an inter-Asian bordersea
Jayati Bhattacharya and Carola Erika Lorea
- 32-33 European private trade in Masulipatnam. Intercultural dynamics in a pre-modern cosmopolitan hub
Sonali Mishra
- 34 Rhythms of the Portuguese presence in the Bay of Bengal
Smarika Nawani
- 35 Empire at leisure. Nineteenth-century Bay of Bengal as a space of trans-colonial recreation
Mikko Toivanen
- 36-37 Anchoring maritime crossings. Coastal heritage of the Bay of Bengal
Himanshu Prabha Ray
- 38 Resistance narratives along the Bay of Bengal border-zones and the expansion of Myanmar's rebellion geography
Maitrii Aung-Thwin
- 39 Writing travel across the Bay of Bengal. Bengali accounts of Burma in the early 20th century
Sanjukta Das Gupta
- 40-41 Changing perceptions of environmental change, vulnerability, and adaptation in the Andaman Islands
Ruhi Deol and Philipp Zehmisch
- 42 Wording lifeworlds. Bengali settler women in the Andaman Islands
Raka Banerjee
- 43 Water and human-nonhuman agency in India's Sundarbans
Calynn Dowler

The Network

- 45-51 Reports and Announcements
- 52-53 IIAS Research
- 54-55 IIAS Fellowship Programme

The Portrait

- 56 A Lasting Memento. John Thomson's Photographs along the River Min
Peabody Essex Museum

In this edition of the Focus

Recentering the Bay of Bengal

Connected spaces in an inter-Asian bordersea

Jayati Bhattacharya
and Carola Erika Lorea

Often considered the periphery and the liquid borderland between South Asia and Southeast Asia, the Bay of Bengal can be seen as the nodal crossroad and the cultural hub for a network of exchanges and contacts of diverse kinds. This inter-littoral world of trade, of spices and fabrics, of sandalwood and muslin, preceded the advent of the big European overseas trading corporations. It is from this time period that our contributors retrace the steps of the social, cultural, economic and political history of the Bay of Bengal and its contemporary value for the understanding of water, changing ecologies, and vulnerable livelihoods. The articles in this Focus add complexity and texture to the public discourse around the strategic importance of the Bay of Bengal, and seek to de-romanticize notions of transnational flows, bringing up instances of disconnections, disruptions, and unequal mobilities within and across the Bay.



The Newsletter is a free periodical published by the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS). As well as serving as a forum for scholars to share research, commentary and opinion with colleagues in academia and beyond, The Newsletter is also a window into the Institute. Information about the programmes and activities of IIAS can be found in the Network pages of each issue of The Newsletter.

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is a global Humanities and Social Sciences institute and a knowledge exchange platform, based in Leiden, the Netherlands, with programmes that engage Asian and other international partners. IIAS takes a thematic and multi-sectoral approach to the study of Asia and actively involves scholars and experts from different disciplines and regions in its activities. Our current thematic research clusters are 'Asian Heritages', 'Asian Cities' and 'Global Asia'.

In this issue

Planning for ICAS 12 in Kyoto is already in full swing; find out more on p.4 of this issue, and online at, www.icas.asia. Make sure to send us your proposal, or perhaps submit your new publication to the ICAS Book Prize! Two members of the European Alliance for Asian Studies have contributed to the regional pages in this issue (pp.16-20), as has our regional editor at Seoul National University Asia Center (pp.21-23). The report on pp.46-47 is the latest update of a project in the IIAS Humanities across Borders programme: 'Street food practices in Dakar and its environs'. You can read about the UKNA symposium 'Ambivalent Infrastructures' in Nagaland on p.48, along with a short account of the 'deportation' of some of the participants. On the opposite page, we are informed about the Double Degree Programme in 'Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe'. Our latest announcements can be found on p.51; IIAS research programmes, networks and other initiatives are described in brief on pp.52-53; and on pp.54-55 you will find information about the IIAS Fellows and Fellowship programme.

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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Beyond the 'competitive' model

Philippe Peycam

After the frenzy of ICAS 11, the IIAS team has been taking stock of what this exceptional event meant not only for future ICAS events but also for the institute and its other activities, along with its capacity to do things in an always more innovative, inclusive and meaningful fashion.

One of the important meetings that took place at ICAS 11 directly dealt with the question of the role of 'area studies' academic institutions such as IIAS and the ways in which they can best serve as interdisciplinary, transcultural/national platforms. I am referring to the workshop "Institutional Support for Area Studies in Europe – Trends, Opportunities, Limitations", a joint IIAS/GIS-ASIE roundtable organised under the aegis of the European Alliance of Asian Studies (EAAS). The workshop was significant in that it sought to freely discuss the situation in which – in the context of Europe, and a perception shared by many institutions devoted to Asia studies – their work of developing a contextualised comprehension of regions and societies of the world, and 'their' entanglements with 'ours', has not always been well appreciated within academia and within society.

Area (Asia) studies must be recognised as a unique vector of knowledge with its multiplier effects, not just in terms of scholarly research 'impacts', or the direct benefits of training language and country or region 'specialists', but in its potential to formulate new methodologies (comparisons and connections), new pedagogies (transcending mental and institutional boundaries), and new relationships (between societies, between situated experiences, between the academic and non-academic communities).

In the last two decades at least, the restructuring of higher education and the trend towards its corporatisation characterised by a sharp decline in funding support, especially after the 2008-10 financial crisis, has meant that area studies scholars and their institutions have been subjected to an increase in narrow bureaucratic scrutiny and an exacerbated competition to prove their economic 'sustainability', a process resulting in soaring precariousness for their members and for the development of these organisations.

Against this Social Darwinist trend, a number of institutions have set out to move beyond the current prescribed logic of competition by exchanging their experiences while trying to revisit some of their programmatic, even epistemological, models with a renewed interest in globally connected, reciprocated collaborations. At stake for these organisations and the individual scholars in their midst, is a recognition on the part of the public (state), civic (society) and private (foundation) sectors of the need to better support their unique research, educational and service capabilities, including the importance of continuing to train in languages.

One challenge they are facing is to engage substantively with national and international (EU) agencies that are meant to fund them, a task few feel qualified to achieve by themselves, hence the existence of the European Alliance for Asian Studies, and along with it, the organisation by two of its members of the workshop at ICAS. The critical aim of that exploratory meeting was to ascertain to what extent European and national state structures as well as foundations could be included in conversations about the (re-) working of Asia (area) studies in our always more entangled and diverse societies. One question was whether some of the existing funding programmes (Marie Curie, ERC, VIDI, ANR, etc.) could be better adapted, and supplemented, to promote the consolidation and renovation of 'area studies' in Europe.

A reality that the discussions in Leiden highlighted was a sense of disconnect that presently exists between these support mechanisms as they operate today and the actual working of area/Asia studies programmes. There is a shared view among the latter that when funding schemes exist, they are usually too rigidly framed to fit their needs. That they tend to privilege projects with prescriptive responses, often promoting quantifiable if not positivist approaches that do not properly reflect the subtle shifts intervening in today's post-Cold War, post-colonial world, and the practice of area studies that draws from it.

Also, these mechanisms tend to stress systemic competition among individuals rather than the need for more collaborative

capacity building initiatives. They (EU's Erasmus Mundi for instance) create complex bureaucratic models often at the expense of organically developed modes of cooperative engagement. As is similar in other branches of the humanities and the social sciences, these programmes follow a quantitative evaluation system originating from the hard sciences, with insistence on 'metrics' rather than substance, and on short term 'deliverables' as opposed to long term transformative processes.

One way to remedy the current marginalisation of area studies, as proposed by the workshop participants, is to encourage more direct, reciprocal collaborative immersions in the regions under study, and to do this in relation to other areas so as to facilitate comparisons. A model of decentred, multi-polar learning should in turn facilitate the capacities of scholars to grapple with urgent topics of global concerns, which a narrow definition of 'Asia' no longer helps to elucidate: phenomena of ecological mutations, digitisation and media, mass urbanisation, ubiquity of English at the cost of other languages, opposing medical systems, issues of political and academic freedom, etc.

To achieve this, academic area studies programmes and their institutional funders should learn to work together in a more horizontal, proactive fashion. More regular interactions and more flexibility in collaboration is needed to support diversified approaches of engagement, beyond the rigid 'competitive' individualised metrics-based grant model. Long term cooperation between European academic organisations and their Asian and global counterparts, in close interaction with their respective social environments, should be encouraged. More than ever, there is a need for all players involved, funding agencies included, to re-invent Asia/area studies by recognising the ever-growing interconnection of societies, aspects of historical permanence and fluidities, while acknowledging that movements of people and ideas continue, even if restricted and orientated.

Philippe Peycam
Director IIAS

Call for applications

We invite applications for the Chair of Taiwan Studies at Leiden University. The Chair provides a Professorial Fellow position of five or ten months for a visiting scholar in Taiwan Studies to teach and conduct research at Leiden University and the International Institute for Asian Studies (Leiden, The Netherlands). The Fellowship covers (one or both of) the two semesters September 2020-January 2021, and February-June 2021.

To facilitate the Taiwan Studies Programme at Leiden University, the Department of Cross-Strait Education of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China, Taiwan, the Leiden University Faculty of Humanities and the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) have jointly established a Chair of Taiwan Studies, based at the Faculty of Humanities. The Chair provides a Professorial Fellow position for a visiting scholar in Taiwan Studies, preferably, but not exclusively, in the fields of Critical Heritage Studies, Urban Studies or the study of Global Asia, which are the IIAS' focal areas.

For five or ten months in the academic year 2020-2021, the position will be open to applicants from all universities and research

institutes in Taiwan or elsewhere. Candidates with a full professorial position at their home institution whose research focuses on Taiwan and preferably falls within any of the fields mentioned above are particularly welcome to apply.

The Chair of Taiwan Studies will teach and conduct research at Leiden University and IIAS. The Ministry of Education in Taiwan and IIAS at Leiden University will sponsor round-trip airfare, living expenses, accommodation, office facilities, as well as relevant expenses for one research conference.

The Professorial Fellow can invite one master's degree or PhD student affiliated with the Professorial Fellow's home institution to come to Leiden for a short-term study or exchange visit during the Fellow's stay in Leiden.

Professorial Fellowship for the Chair of Taiwan Studies at Leiden University, the Netherlands, 2020-2021



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The Netherlands



Please submit applications (CVs in both Mandarin and English; one proposal in English) to the Education Division of the Taipei Representative Office in the EU and Belgium at belgium@mail.moe.gov.tw

Applications should include suggestions for a teaching course, or courses, at BA or MA level.

Application deadline: 16 April 2020

For further information, please contact:

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Enticement: Stories of Tibet

Natalia Moskaleva



Reviewed title Enticement: Stories of Tibet

Pema Tsenden. 2018. ed. and trans. by Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani and Michael Monhart

Albany, NY: State University of New York Press
ISBN 9781438474267

Enticement is a new window into contemporary literature about Tibet created by a Tibetan author and made accessible for all by its translators in English. Originality of the stories' plots, which to some extent could even be called exotic, runs hand in hand with descriptions of universally shared feelings and challenges experienced by many people in their everyday life. Being a graphic piece of art, the book pictures a beautiful faraway world of Tibetan grassland, snowy mountains, and local people. Witty, naive, cunning, loving, joking, or distressed and going through hardship Tibetan characters frequently remind a reader of something personal and forgotten. The stories could refresh a memory from one's childhood, something once felt or seen somewhere else. However, at the same time, a peculiar twist or twists of each story returns the reader back to the realities of Tibet.

As Pema Tsenden puts it in the Author's Preface: "Many times I write fiction for no other reason than to enter this state in which I can see and know myself more deeply. ... All the words you want to say can be found in the texts you write" (p.1). *Enticement*, indeed, does not show modern Tibet as a flat postcard. Tsenden's words written down as stories set a reader on a trip of deeper

contemplation – deeper into the wondering minds of Tibetans and deeper into one's own inner world. *Enticement* as a compilation of ten stories touches upon completely different aspects of life: friendship, love and care, birth and death, treachery, loyalty, cruelty, modernization and globalization, Buddhist beliefs and local superstitions, extraordinary coincidences, and human reflections about life. While many stories tend to present rather realistic descriptions, in terms of literary styles one could encounter elements of traditional Tibetan folk tales (e.g. the traditional frame of the Golden Corpse Tales), examples of magical realism, or even science fiction.

Interwoven with Buddhist themes and traditional Tibetan cultural markers, *Enticement* goes further beyond the commonly understood topics of human happiness or grief. Tsenden introduces a reader to the way of life on the Tibetan Plateau that is gradually going through changes. Alongside the main line of the plot, the author offers a glimpse of modern Tibet and the ongoing social transformations there: be it the existing tradition of religious reincarnations facing the modernity, Mao Zedong's literary heritage still vividly living in the memory of Tibetan people, first encounters of Tibetans with a modern flow of Westerners enchanted with Tibetan culture, rural Tibetans not being able to speak Chinese or lacking the practical grasp of the urban Tibetan population and being beguiled by them, Tibetans being swept over by the wave of modernization in the form of

compulsory ID registration, or struggling with the gambling plague.

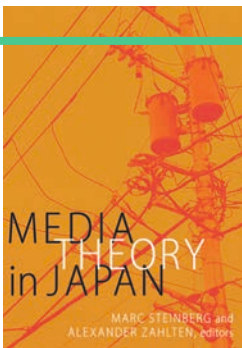
The reader is travelling through Tibetan villages, cities and pastures. One gets to meet the curious minds seeking to see a bigger picture behind the average routine life, one gets to laugh at the funny perplexities of life, one gets to share the joy and pain of the protagonists, one gets to peek into modern Tibet and the various happenings there. Besides, there is no politics or anything didactical. These stories describe things simply as they are, void of any moralization. *Enticement* is Tibetan and universal at the same time. Despite the fact that the protagonists are Tibetan and are living in the conditions quite often unfamiliar for the bulk of us, a reader still can relate to their feelings. Most stories finely catch your attention and keep in suspense till the end.

I can assume that the perception of Tsenden's stories might vary for a reader with a different cultural background. However, being limited as a Western urban dweller and a Tibetan Studies student, I believe that *Enticement* is an exciting ride in the world with Tibetan flavour worth taking by anyone – be it a keen Tibetologist or any other interested reader. I would highly recommend reading this book to any reader willing to learn more of modern Tibet and would certainly suggest adding this book to a reading list for classes on modern Tibetan literature or culture.

Natalia Moskaleva, Saint-Petersburg State University, Russia

Media Theory in Japan

Tom Mes



Reviewed title Media Theory in Japan

Marc Steinberg and Alexander Zahlten (eds). 2017.

Durham and London: Duke University Press
ISBN 9780822363125

Dating back to the 1950s at least, the study of Japanese film can rightly be considered a venerable discipline in Western academia. Its research agendas, though, have to a significant extent been decided by scholars' mastery of the Japanese language, or rather by the lack thereof. This has at times resulted in what Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto has identified as an "interpretative machine", which supplied scholars, even those who lacked linguistic skills, with 'stock images of national character, tradition, and fixed cultural traits' that allowed them to 'understand' and comment on their research object.

Partially as an extension of this problem, scholarship has also suffered from a skewed perspective, with Japan's films and filmmakers receiving ample devotion, but scant attention being paid to the country's wider media landscape, even at a time when Film Studies has widely evolved to include media more broadly. This is a rather peculiar phenomenon, since, as Marc Steinberg and Alexander Zahlten point out in the introduction to their new anthology *Media Theory in Japan*, Japan possesses "one of the largest and most complex media industries on the planet" (p.2). Not only does it make sense for scholars to more frequently consider it as a case study, but Japan also is a nation with its own long and chequered history of theoretical writing on media. As Akira Mizuta Lippit observes in a preface that is, characteristically, as playful as it is challenging: for too long have we thought that understanding and theorizing media only happens in the West – even when the media themselves were made elsewhere.

This blank spot which Japan currently occupies on the 'Euro-American media-theoretical map' is allegorized most effectively in Marilyn Ivy's contribution to this volume, which begins with the realization that she is the first person to ever check out from her university library a volume of *InterCommunication*, one of Japan's most authoritative journals of media scholarship, which ran from 1992 through 2000. So either there are too few Western media scholars that can read Japanese – an understandable phenomenon – or too few Japanologists have an interest in media studies. Probably, it is a good deal of both.

Media Theory in Japan boldly volunteers to begin filling this gap. It does not limit its ambitions there, however; as Steinberg and Zahlten point out, this is not just the first 'systematic introduction to and contextualization of' the history of Japanese media theory in the English language, it is the first book to do this in any language, including Japanese. Aware of the challenges their pioneering effort faces, the editors propose a shift in how to view concept of 'media theory', away from a deceptive pretence at universality that is in fact firmly Western-centric, and toward seeing it as "a practice composed of local, medium-specific, and culture-inflected practices" (p.6).

Steinberg and Zahlten are no strangers to such an approach, having deftly demonstrated its pertinence in their respective monographs *Anime's Media Mix* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012) and *The End of Japanese Cinema* (Duke University Press, 2017). Both these

volumes investigated examples of the kind of constellations of interlocking and cross-fertilising media and their social functions that we have come to refer to as media ecologies.

The scope of what *Media Theory in Japan* considers as constituting 'media' is wide and varied. Some are familiar staples, such as Aaron Gerow's essay on television theory in Japan, in which he observes how much of this echoed the preoccupations of many pre-war film theorists that had been dismissed, ignored or forgotten in the intervening years. Other choices come across at first as rather more unexpected, such as Yuriko Furuhashi's consideration of architecture as a medium. Yet her chapter provides what is surely the finest possible example of a literal media ecology, of media forming a ubiquitous environment – considering Tokyo's media-saturated cityscape with its multitude of gaudy advertisements and giant video screens blaring and flinging messages into the urban atmosphere. Her consideration of architect Tange Kenzo's theories from the 1960s provide the necessary historical framework for something that has come to represent a popular techno-orientalist image of a hyper-urbanized, hyper-saturated future through such films as Ridley Scott's 1982 sci-fi classic *Blade Runner*. While this image needs to be seen in some degree of perspective – so much of Tokyo is a sprawl of bland cookie-cutter functionalism, with the media saturation mostly concentrated in the urban centres surrounding such major railway hubs as Shibuya, Shinjuku and Ikebukuro – its hold on the popular imagination across cultural borders is undeniable.

Quite a number of contributors to this volume shine a light on past theorists and on the journals and other avenues through which they published, thus providing a roadmap that connects previously unconnected (and many cases unknown) dots, while also offering anchoring points from which future scholarship can begin charting further areas and topics. A fine example is Zahlten's chapter on the wave of 'New Academism', which during the 1980s saw unparalleled commercial success and popular media exposure for such theorists as Asada Akira, Nakazawa Shinichi, Yomota Inuhiko and Ueno Chizuko. Though on occasion, people, discourses, or practices under review tend rather too much toward the insular, especially in terms of their pertinence for anyone not already firmly and profoundly engaged with the study of the Japanese media landscape, as is the case with Ryoko Misono's chapter on television critic Nancy Seki.

Other contributors cover what may seem at first like familiar ground, yet delve deeper to

adjust an all too limited popular image, such as in Takeshi Kadobayashi's essay on Azuma Hiroki, primarily known internationally as the man who theorised the otaku figure in his influential *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (Kodansha gendai shinsho, 2001). Kadobayashi charts Azuma's career and thematic fixations well beyond his most famous work, charting what he suggests is an ongoing process to shift emphasis from media theory to media strategy. Steinberg explores how Marshall McLuhan's theories were adopted and assimilated to fit an existing need in the Japanese advertising industry, in a way that suited the local situation rather than necessarily remaining true to intended meanings. Tomiko Yoda too looks at advertising, specifically its role in the creation of a consumer demographic that had previously been ignored, and its disposable time and income left untapped: single young women. In the same breath she also charts the shaping of Tokyo's Shibuya district into the consumer-driven, media-saturated cityscape noted earlier.

Media Theory in Japan is divided into three sections, though the choice for which essay fits which section occasionally comes across as somewhat arbitrary: the chapter on Azuma Hiroki, for example, is found under 'Communication Technologies' alongside the essays on television and architecture, rather than under one of the more appropriate-sounding sections 'Practical Theory' and 'Mediation and Media Theory'. Also, given co-editor Zahlten's familiarity with the topic (as he demonstrated in *The End of Japanese Cinema*, an investigation into home video could have lent the 'Communication Technologies' section a more robust profile. The global impact of the VCR, which was developed by Sony and JVC, and our almost complete lack of knowledge of Japanese theoretical writing on the topic certainly form enough reason for its inclusion in a collection of this kind. The editors even mention in their introduction how the popular success of the VCR contributed to a boom in 'new media' discourse during the 1980s, but the medium is conspicuous for its absence from all subsequent pages, index included.

But these are minor quibbles (admittedly from someone who makes video his own field of research), since this is an otherwise rigorously conceived and realised tome that provides solid foundations for future research in a wealth of disciplines, not limited to media studies and Japanology, but also notably for the social sciences.

Tom Mes, Leiden University, The Netherlands