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ICAS 11th, Leiden, The Netherlands (July 16-19 2019)

This year, Leiden was the host city to the 11th International Convention for Asian Scholars (ICAS), marking its 21st anniversary since the Convention held its first edition in 1998 in the same city. The chosen theme was “Asia and Europe, Asia in Europe” in celebration of its return to Europe, after several editions held in Asia. This European edition was also marked, for the first time, by its collaboration with another European organisation, the GIS Asie (French Academic Network for Asian Studies) additionally to its partnership with local host Leiden University. This first Franco-Dutch collaboration brought an impressive representation of French institutions, not least than 20 of them, and about 200 scholars.

One can only acknowledge the remarkably smooth and efficient organisation considering the size of the event. The four-day convention gathered more than 2 500 participants from over 75 countries, with domains of research ranging from Asia-related Humanities and Social Sciences to Civil Society and the Arts. It saw 550 panel sessions, round tables and book/Ph. D. presentations with new fields of research represented. An additional pre-event day, on July 15th, was scheduled to host papers dedicated to Vietnam. These figures are impressive considering that former conventions used to host around 1 000-1 200 participants. The convention was held in seven different buildings belonging to the University of Leiden, all spread a short walking distance from each other. It was a real challenge to host such a huge event without too much disruption in a small fortified inner-city which size did not expand since the 17th c. One can imagine thousands of Asian scholars (with large

identifiable name tags hanging around the neck) walking from one conference building to another, along Leiden's narrow brick streets, canals, or invading Leiden's terraced cafés. To make things more remarkable even, the four-day conference was blessed with a hot sunny weather. For those wanting to tour the old city, a few city historians were available to guide them through the whole duration of the conference.

Another specific feature of the ICAS format is the greater participation of host cities in organising the conventions. Leiden not only functioned as an important sponsor but also provided the necessary bureaucratic back-up for an event of this scale. As clarified by IIAS director Philippe Peycam, this choice to favour partners from the public sector and local society (universities and cities) was meant to "highlight the need to culturally and socially contextualise these academic events and their intrinsic civic character" (pers. comm.). This formula seems not only to have helped ICAS grow throughout the years but seems also to have benefited local businesses. In Adelaide, for example, the ICAS event "injected 5 million Australian Dollars" into the city's economy in 2015, according to a special anniversary article (IIAS, *The Newsletter* 83, p. 7)

This convention not only hosted conferences but also welcomed several other academic and culture related events and round tables, such as the GIS Asie biennial conference, a meeting of the "Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge" conference, and the ICAS Book and Dissertation Prizes, which offers since 2017 an award for publications in five other languages than English: Chinese, French, German, Korean and Spanish/Portuguese. The French book prize this year was given to Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens and Marianne Bujard's *Les dynasties Qin et Han: Histoire générale de la Chine (221 av. J.-C.-220 apr. J.-C) [The Qin and Han Dynasties: General History of China (221 BC-220 AD)]*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2017, 511 p. The convention also hosted, for the first time, the IIAS Academic Freedom Space, a format initiated during the previous 2019 Chiang Mai edition, following an intense discussion on the lack of democracy in most Southeast Asian countries. Cultural events included a film festival as well as several other exhibitions in the University, in museums and cultural or technical research centers in the city.

This ICAS celebratory edition deserves a small remark on its origins considering the discrepancy between the leading role it has come to play internationally in Asian Studies and the fact that academia in France seems still slightly more familiar with the EuroSEAS, which is more systematically organised in Europe. For about a decade, ICAS has been considered as the largest meeting of Asian scholars. Created a few years after the foundation of EuroSEAS in 1992, ICAS' primary purpose was to promote the internationalisation of Asian Studies, following the objective of the IIAS (International Institute for Asian Studies), its mother institution founded in 1993. Pulling it away from then US-centric academic organisations such as the Association for Asian Studies

(AAS) where it was mostly focused back in the 1990s, it started to promote the idea of a more interdisciplinary and cross-regional scholarship, as Paul van der Velde recalls (*The Newsletter*, No. 83 Summer 2019, p. 4). ICAS grew more geographically diversified after its first two editions in Leiden and Berlin, when the organising parties decided to organise the event biannually in Asia. Singapore became the first Asian host city in 2003, and was followed by Shanghai (2005), Kuala Lumpur (2007) and Deajeon (2009). Witnessing the creation of the ICAS International Council, 2013 was the year ICAS also supported the Association of Asian Studies to create the future series of conferences “Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge” in line with its idea to foster more cross-continental representation.

The overwhelming four-day schedule with the scrolling of two thousand and more papers was however made easily accessible on the web thanks to an online programme and mobile application. This ergonomic tool had a useful multi-entry and keyword search that shows the great interdisciplinary and cross-cultural representation of ICAS. The topics were gathered in fifteen main searchable themes and disciplines (see below), that show an interesting domination of humanities related papers: History, Culture, Art, Society and Identity related papers being the three most represented disciplines. Politics, International Relations as well as Politics of Culture coming fourth and fifth.

History	399
Arts and Culture	324
Society and Identity	236
Politics and International Relations	227
Heritage and the Politics of Culture	203
Migration and Diasporas	178
Development and Urbanisation	127
Language and Literature	115
Religion and Beliefs	113
Education	68
Media, Communication, Digitalisation	58
Environment	51
Economy	36
Knowledge and Philosophy	30
Welfare and Health	9

Area-wise, the keyword search tool also shows that Southeast Asia was not too far below the big Asian countries. Indonesia reaches 232 occurrences

against 392 for India 452 for Japan and far above however, 682 for China. Among Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia comes first, followed by Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. It would have been interesting to know if other editions of the convention held as many Indonesia related panels or if this had to do with the choice of the Netherlands as host country. Indeed, if we look at the panels related to Indonesia, there is a fair representation of conveners and speakers of Dutch nationality or related to a Dutch academic institution from various disciplines.

Indonesia 232 (Java: 73)
Vietnam: 107
Philippines: 101
Thailand: 73
Malaysia: 64 (Malay: 119)
Myanmar: 47
Cambodia: 33 (Khmer: 13)
Laos: 30
Search by Western countries names
UK: 175
France: 72
Australia: 53
Germany: 42

*The figures above indicate the occurrences for panels and papers altogether.

The limited space of this review does not allow us to cite all the interesting panels we attended pertaining to history, material culture and the arts. Four of them deserve a special mention for the originality and quality of the presentations. The first two panels addressed the themes of colonial museum and library collections, their history, the ethics, conservation and restitution issues from various historical, ethnographic and curatorial perspectives:

“The Ethics of Collecting” chaired by Andre Bouwman as well as the double panel chaired by Marieke Bloembergen “Unpacking the Asian Library: Collecting Histories and Collecting Networks from Asia to Europe I and II.” These papers shed a light on the sensitive issue of public institutions (museums and libraries) and researchers’ responsibility in collecting and rendering histories, colonial guilt, the complex question of provenance and the market, relationship and shared responsibility with the original owners, as well as the context and network prior to their entry in public institutions (looting, military expeditions, trade exchange, gifts, etc.).

Another interesting panel convened by Yumi Sugahara “Rethinking the Process of Islamisation: Transformation of Religion as Reflected in Javanese Texts,” addressed the main narratives on conversion to Islam, the peaceful conversion narrative in comic books, dream driven conversion and the importance of supernatural powers, early debates about ethic sufism in 16th Java and another text, the *Serat Panji Paniba* (1816) possibly hiding an anti-colonial message. Last, a well-attended panel on art history convened by Marijke Klokke “Cultural Transmission in Material Culture: Adaption and Localisation in Medieval China, Japan and Java (8th-12th Centuries)” had richly illustrated presentations by young Asian scholars addressing patterns (animal in roundels, naga/dragon and phoenix) as well as music symbols transmission across Central, East and Southeast Asia from the 8th to 12th century.

The convention ended with a grand party at the very large City-Auditorium, where attendees could start drawing travel plans to Kyoto where ICAS 12th will be held in 2021.

Full panel titles

Panel: “The Ethics of Collecting.”

Papers: Collecting, Restitution and Emotional Property by Pieter ter Keurs; Collections After Colonial Engagement in Bali by Francine Brinkgreve; From Private to Public. A New Context of Display by Liesbeth Ouweland.

Panel “Unpacking the Asian Library: Collecting Histories, and Collecting Networks from Asia to Europe I and II.”

Papers from panel I: Histories and Collecting Histories of a Javanese Manuscript: The Treasures of Rouffaer by Sri Margana; A Book for a Book, Malay Manuscript Transactions in a Malay-European Network in a Mid-19th-Century West Sumatran Port Town by Marije Plomp; The Life of the Cakranagara Lontar Collection by Wayan J. Sastrawan.

Papers from panel II: The Society and the Library: Comparing Collection-Building and Knowledge Formation in British Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies by Keng We Koh and Gracie Lee; The Formation of the Indonesian Manuscript Collection in the British Library by Annabel Gallop; Circles of Initiation. Philological and Spiritual Knowledge Networks, Ancient Manuscripts and the Roads, 1930s-1970s by Marieke Bloembergen; Scholars, Filmmakers, Fixers: The Making of Local Knowledge in ‘Recording the Future’ by David Kloos.

Panel “Rethinking the Process of Islamisation: Transformation of Religion as Reflected in Javanese Texts.”

Papers: Sunan Bonang’s Teaching: Theology and Sufism in 16th Century Java by Yumi Sugahara; Two Perceptions of Royal Response to the Introduction of Islam in Malay and Javanese Literary Narratives by Toru Aoyama; Not

by the Sword? The Grand Narrative of Java's Peaceful Islamisation in Contemporary Comics by Edwin P. Wieringa; Save Java: Reading the *Serat Panji Paniba* (1816) by Willem van der Molen.

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